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BA (Hons) Business Studies

MEd (Leadership and Management)

*Adult student motives for accessing the
Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme*

Submitted for the degree of Doctorate in Education (EdD)
within the discipline of Education.

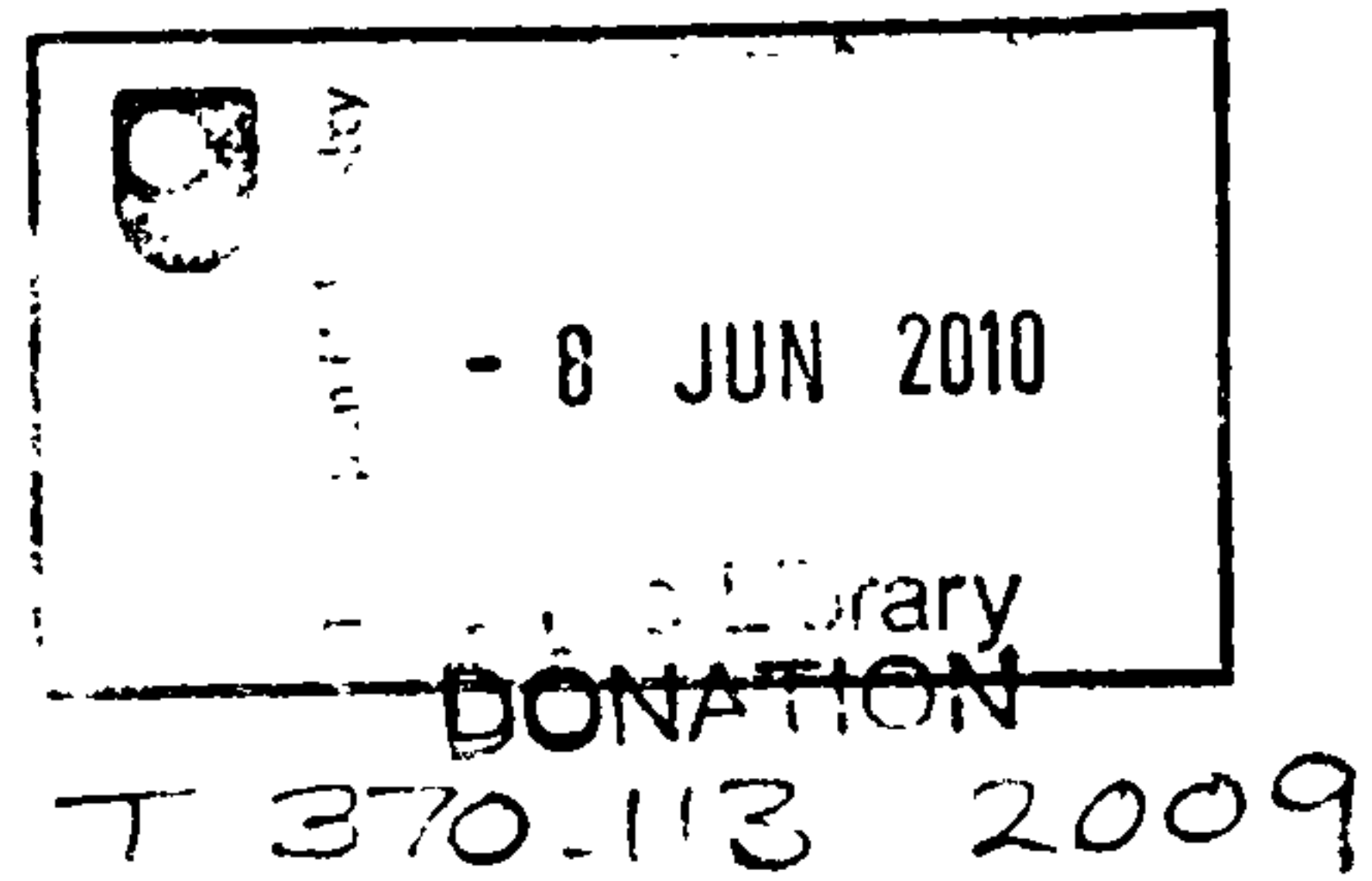
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and our wonderful children Joe and Lauren.*

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(i) Glossary

AEGI:	Adult Educational Guidance Initiative.
AEO:	Adult Education Officer. <i>(Prior to 2004 this body of personnel was referred to as Adult Education Organisers).</i>
ALO:	Adult Literacy Organiser.
BTEA:	Back To Education Allowance.
BTEC:	Business and Technology Education Council.
BTEI:	Back To Education Initiative.
CCNA:	Cisco Certified Network Associate.
CEC:	Commission of the European Communities.
Centre:	Refers to the local educational building where educational services are offered.
CEO:	Chief Executive Officer.
CEU:	Council of the European Union.
Coordinator:	Manager or principal person in charge of VTOS centre.
Core:	Refers to a cohort of VTOS students enrolled in a full-time programme located in a dedicated VTOS centre.
CSO:	Central Statistics Office.
DES:	Department of Education and Science.
DM:	Dispersed Mode. <i>This is a type of VTOS student participating in other courses (usually PLC) at another location.</i>
ECDL:	European Computer Driving Licence.
EdD:	The Doctorate in Education Programme, Open University.

ESOL:	English for Speakers of Other Languages.
ESRI:	Economic and Social Research Institute.
FÁS:	Foras Áiseanna Saothair. <i>The national training and employment authority responsible for enhancing the skills and capabilities of people and enterprise.</i>
FETAC:	Further Education and Training Awards Council.
FTT:	Fast-track Into Technology.
HE:	Higher Education.
IAS:	International Accreditation Service.
IATI:	Institute of Accounting Technicians in Ireland.
ICT:	Information and Communication Technology.
IELTS:	International English Language Testing System.
IOFGA:	Irish Organic Farmers' and Growers' Association.
ITEC:	International Therapy Examination Council.
LAMDA:	London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art.
LCA:	Leaving Certificate Applied.
NAVC:	National Association of VTOS Coordinators.
NIACE:	National Institute of Adult Continuing Education.
NCC:	National Competitiveness Council.
NFQ:	National Framework of Qualifications.
NUI:	National University of Ireland.
OCR:	Oxford, Cambridge and RSA Examinations.
OU:	Open University.
PLC:	Post Leaving Certificate.
RSA:	Royal Society of Arts.

- STTC: Senior Traveller Training Centre.
- Teagasc: Irish Agriculture and Food Development Authority.
- TEFL: Teaching English as a Foreign Language.
- UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation.
- VEC: Vocational Educational Committee. *Regional educational boards charged with education provision in Ireland.*
- VSSU: VEC Support Service Unit.
- VTOS: Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme.
- White Paper: Government policy publication on a particular issue.

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(iv) Abstract

The overall aim of this thesis is to uncover adult student motives for returning to a full-time formal adult education programme called the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) and to better understand the obstacles encountered by such adults.

This thesis profiles VTOS students during the 2007 - 2008 academic year and their views are illuminated by research conducted with VTOS coordinators during a three-year period from 2006 to 2008 inclusive. Applying a pragmatic philosophical underpinning or conceptual framework to a mixed methods sequential explanatory strategy, enabled this researcher to address this thesis in a triangulated manner.

This thesis evidences the idiosyncratic nature of adult students and uncovers a multitude of motivating factors which influence the decisions of adult learners to participate in VTOS.

A key finding of this research is that VTOS students are motivated both by the prospect of employment and by the prospect of further studies leading to employment. Obstacles to accessing VTOS are explored and the restrictive capacity of VTOS emerged as one of the greatest national obstacles. Many other obstacles emerged from within the student, the greatest of which was a lack of self-belief.

A series of conclusions and recommendations are presented, including; an increase in the capacity of VTOS to meet current demands, a review of financial incentives for grant assisted adult students, the establishment of *Local Adult Learning Boards* and the promotion of an *ambassador students* programme to further encourage word of mouth and reduce the obstacles of fear and self-doubt amongst potential students.

It is hoped that the findings of this research will further the discussion of interested parties on the following aspects of VTOS; widening participation, recruitment, admissions, retention, achievement and programme content.

Chapter One Introduction

When planning for a year, plant corn. When planning for a decade, plant trees. When planning for life, train and educate people. (Chinese proverb).

What motivates eligible adults to access or enrol on VTOS? This is the central question this thesis endeavours to address. Further important questions which emerge from this principle question are as follows:

- What obstacles do such adults encounter in seeking to access VTOS?
- What type of adult learner is accessing VTOS?
- How accessible is VTOS to eligible adults?

The overall aim of this research process is to uncover adult student motives for accessing what is often perceived as a second chance adult education programme entitled the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme and to better understand the obstacles encountered by such adults. Fleming (1998: 58) perhaps best describes second chance education as a way of reclaiming lost possibilities. The rationale for this study emerged from a desire to better understand nationally the students that VTOS serves, with a view towards realising an improved VTOS provision in areas such as recruitment, admissions, induction and programme content.

This study is confined to core VTOS students and the research questions addressed serve to create a portrait of the VTOS adult student experience in relation to accessing full-time formal adult education in the form of a VTOS programme. In a bid to present a more overt research account, there now follows a brief researcher biography.

Biography of the researcher

This research topic is firmly rooted in Irish adult education. This researcher is both a VTOS coordinator and tutor at an adult education centre in Co. Tipperary. This researcher is also a lifelong learner, formal, non-formal and informal. This researcher is a promoter of lifelong learning, facilitating a variety of formal educational programmes to meet the demands of adult learners at a range of levels on their formal education path, under the umbrella title of Further Education. This researcher's role is one of interested researcher and agent for change, recognising change is constant in a continuously evolving society, economy and educational landscape.

As the disciplines of social science and education are concerned with the human condition and with our understanding of ourselves, each other and the world we live in, this researcher is mindful that approaches adopted in research tend to reflect one's own conceptions of social reality. Sikes (2004: 19) stresses the importance of researchers identifying how they are paradigmatically and philosophically positioned, ensuring a more reflexive

and reflective researcher and hopefully a more rigorous researcher. This is a most complex endeavour incorporating many variables, with this researcher emerging somewhere centred between opposing positions as opposed to on one distinct side of a polar position. Therefore what follows is not black and white yet does serve to portray the positionality of this researcher and ethically serves to better inform the reader.

Ontologically this researcher views social reality more as socially constructed and subjectively experienced than as objective reality, necessitating a qualitative element to the overall design of this research inquiry. Epistemologically this researcher's history lies in the belief in hard quantitative knowledge capable of measurement and transmission in a tangible form. From early in this research inquiry that position became strained as it was failing to sufficiently address the thesis title and was somewhat at variance with this researcher's ontological position.

This researcher's opinion is that knowledge is softer, more subjective and based on lived experiences. Therefore as with this researcher's ontological stance, it was epistemologically necessary to address this research inquiry with a qualitative strand without dismissing the quantitative tradition completely. This qualitative strand is particularly evidenced through the learner story extracts, which emerged from the focus groups and these are presented in Chapter Five.

This researcher's assumptions concerning human nature and agency are important to illustrate, as at the heart of this thesis is the question of the adult student's decision making processes to access a formal learning programme. Thus how this researcher perceives human behaviour in the world is important to determine. In this instance this researcher's position is very much an acceptance of two polar positions, depending on the impacting circumstances faced by humans.

This researcher believes human nature and behaviour are constituted both by voluntary reasoning and by external conditions and forces depending on the faced circumstances. Humans at times respond mechanically to environmental factors and at other times exercise free will. For some students, motivation to enrol will have been influenced by external conditions such as losing their job, whilst for others the decision will have been inspired by the desire to learn about computers for example.

An insider and an outsider researcher

Having been involved in VTOS for fifteen of its twenty year history, this researcher may well be labelled an insider researcher. The first half of this researcher's VTOS experience was acquired in one of the largest VTOS centres in the country, in a large urban area. The latter half was acquired in a relatively small VTOS centre in a more rural setting. This experience has enabled this researcher to access the views of the majority of VTOS coordinators and a significant sample of VTOS students. Hammersley (1993: 219) argues that being an established participant in a situation does not

necessarily provide access to valid knowledge that is not available to an outside researcher. This view is at variance with this researcher's experience. This researcher does however agree with Hammersley's (1993: 219) claim that chances of findings being valid can be enhanced by a judicious combination of involvement and estrangement. Involvement for this researcher has cushioned against culture shock, has enhanced professional relationships with colleagues, has led to a greater honesty and greater depth of detail in discursive responses with coordinators and students and has ensured greater communication between this researcher and all respondents through greater understanding of terminology and processes specific to VTOS.

No students at this researcher's VTOS centre were directly involved in any of the research findings presented in this thesis. This researcher's involvement with the many hundreds of students nationally was one of interest; yet as a visiting researcher, this researcher remained an outsider researcher. This was a helpful position to occupy for a number of reasons, particularly reliability and validity. The use of both quantitative and qualitative approaches ensured greater impartiality, objectivity, validity and reliability in the data uncovered, as this triangulation approach allowed for common themes to emerge and areas of conflicting data to be investigated further. This research topic is firmly rooted in the humanistic discipline of the social sciences. Ethically, given this researcher's close involvement with this research topic, account must be taken of potential assumptions or bias on the part of this researcher, particularly in the interpretation of findings.

Hellawell (2006: 492) concludes that all researchers operate on a series of insider-outsider continua and that critically reflecting on one’s own perception as researcher (*and just as importantly, the informant’s perception*), can produce greater reflexivity and rich new knowledge. During this research process this researcher noticed movement in both directions along a positionality continuum as graphically illustrated in Diagram 1.1. As the diagram illustrates, the coordinator workshop was the most insider activity, with the student survey being the most outsider activity. Hellawell (2006: 487) argues that researchers should be both inside and outside the perceptions of the researched, fostering an empathy and alienation which this researcher has endeavoured to demonstrate throughout this process.

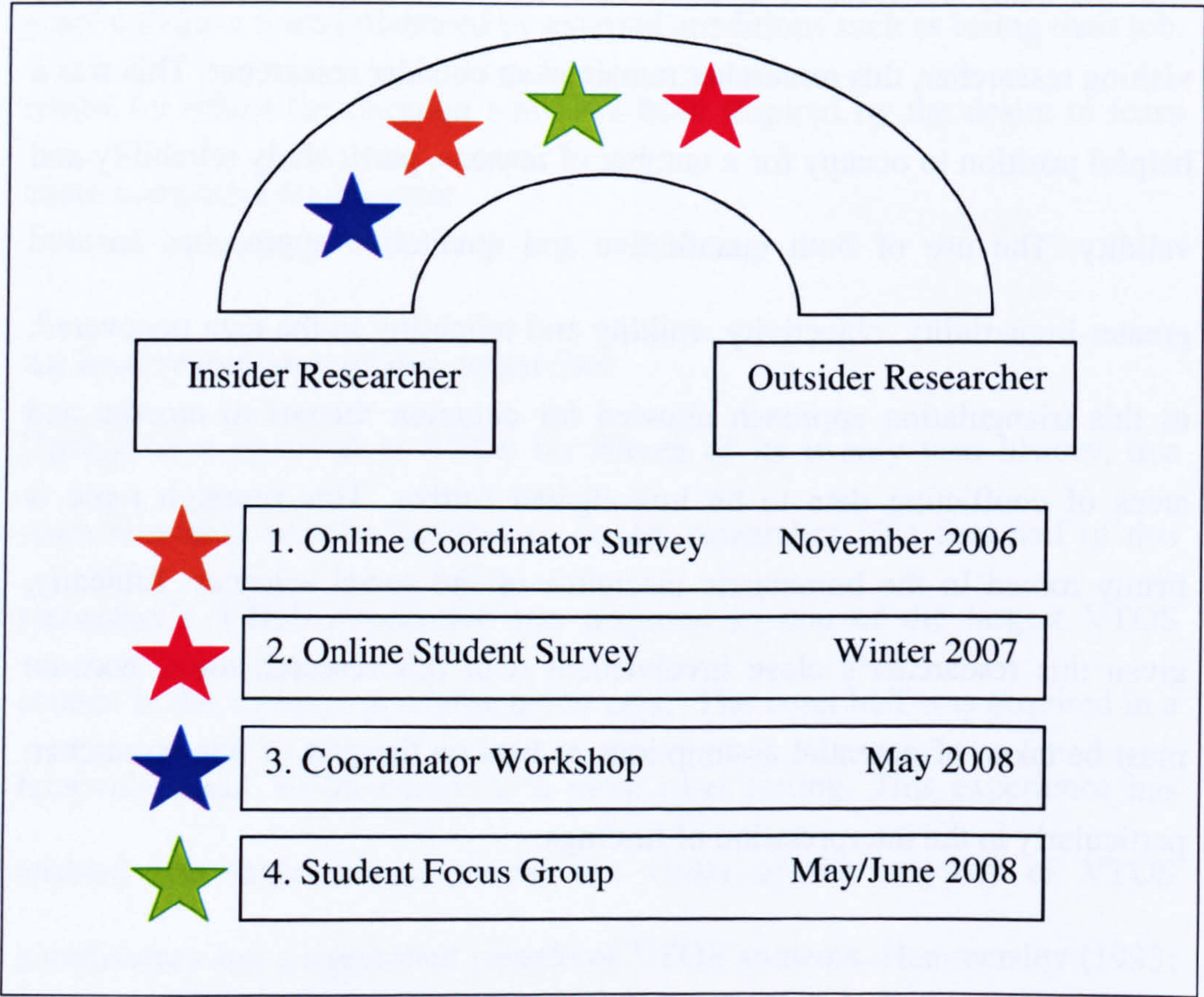


Diagram 1.1 Reflections on researcher positionality

Social research is rarely neat, tidy and structured and must be flexible within an evolving process. One of the justifications for the chosen methodology was the facilitation of multiple viewpoints along this researcher continuum. This researcher sought to extract the greatest number of advantages from each standpoint whilst acknowledging and seeking to counter potential weaknesses of each approach. Thus this researcher is satisfied to claim both an insider and outsider badge for the purposes of this thesis. This introductory chapter now changes focus from the researcher to the research case study, namely, the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme.

VTOS introduction and brief history

This scheme was introduced in 1989 following a piloted scheme called the Education Opportunities Scheme (EOS) which was first initiated in 1986. The EOS was piloted in Dublin and Limerick and the findings from this pilot scheme led to the introduction of a unique national full-time training scheme for unemployed adults called the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme.

VTOS was established as a result of a Government cabinet meeting and was and remains today, located within the Further Education section of the Department of Education and Science. The name change from the pilot scheme was necessitated by a European funding requirement and so VTOS was born. However, this researcher is of the opinion that EOS was and still is

a more appropriate title. It is this researcher's observation that VTOS delivers education and personal development rather than exclusively training.

In the scheme's first year, it operated in seventeen Vocational Education Committees (VECs) with an enrolment of just a few hundred participants. By 1994, it operated in over thirty VECs and had an enrolment of 2,500 participants. Within the following two years, enrolment numbers nearly doubled to 4,400. Enrolment numbers exceeded the 5,000 mark at the turn of the millennium and have since remained largely static with the number at the time of this inquiry standing at approximately 5,400 participants (*Source: Further Education Section, Department of Education and Science*). This cap on VTOS numbers nationally is in itself a significant obstacle to participation in second chance education, particularly given the large increase in adults over twenty-one accessing Further Education. Table 1.1 (p.19) charts the enrolment patterns of VTOS over its twenty year history.

Regrettably this national scheme with 5,000 places was and is insufficient relative to its target audience. To illustrate this point, when VTOS was introduced in 1989, those unemployed numbered 200,000. Unemployment reached a low point over the past twenty years of 130,000 and by September 2009 it had risen to 429,400, (*Source: Central Statistics Office*). Thus one VTOS place for every eighty-six people out of work is less than sufficient, accepting that there are other training initiatives such as FÁS and PLC. Still VTOS has made a positive contribution over its twenty years towards training and re-training many tens of thousands of adults in our economy.

Table 1.1 Student enrolments on VTOS								
<i>Year</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Core F</i>	<i>Core M</i>	<i>DM F</i>	<i>DM M</i>	<i>Total</i>
1990			250*					
1991			450*					
1992			950*					
1993			2900*					
1994			3500*					
1995	2106	2031	4137	1332	1388	774	643	4137
1996	2259	2123	4382	1520	1509	739	614	4382
1997	2377	2030	4407	1544	1373	833	657	4407
1998	2344	1943	4287	1417	1220	927	723	4287
1999	2707	1873	4580	1687	1186	1020	687	4580
2000	3356	1818	5174	2260	1258	1096	560	5174
2001	3519	1786	5305	2547	1247	972	539	5305
2002	3719	1724	5443	2614	1162	1105	562	5443
2003	3821	1880	5701	2613	1249	1208	631	5701
2004	3881	1758	5639	2642	1186	1239	572	5639
2005	3810	1728	5538	2677	1126	1133	602	5538
2006	3652	1732	5384	2589	1176	1063	556	5384
2007	3636	1741	5377	2505	1201	1131	540	5377
2008	3616	1787	5403	2557	1189	1059	598	5403
2009	3537	2031	5568	2487	1354	1050	677	5568
Abbreviations: F = Female, M = Male, DM = Dispersed Mode.								

Source: Compiled figures from National VTOS Office; *VTOS Participants on January 1st*, annual statistical returns to the Further Education Section of the Department of Education and Science as on the 1st of January in each presented year.* Note: Returns prior to 1995 are annualised.

The scheme is a full-time second chance education and training programme which provides courses, normally of one- or two-years’ duration. When first

introduced, VTOS was specifically targeted at those on long-term unemployment but during the 1990s at a time of reducing unemployment, the target audience was expanded to include single parents, those in receipt of a disability payment and other people in receipt of welfare payments. Admission onto VTOS has always been voluntary, recognising that it would be false to assume that adults are always necessarily volunteers for learning. Formal learning involves a considerable personal commitment and is more likely to be successful when the life stage and personal circumstances of each adult learner are appropriate and conducive to the learning programme.

VTOS is located within the Further Education and Training sphere of the Irish education system. This sphere embraces a wide range of education and training that occurs after Second-level mainstream schooling, excluding the Third-level college system. Further Education covers a diverse and broad range of provisions including: PLC, Youthreach, STTC, Adult Literacy, Community Education, Self-funded part-time adult education, BTEI and VTOS.

The objective of VTOS remains to enable adults outside the workplace to make the transition back into the workforce through accessing stable employment and/or further education and training. Admission to VTOS is confined to those who are over twenty-one and who have had a qualifying social welfare payment for at least six months. Adults who are either; unemployed, on a disability payment, lone parents, on a widow's pension, or a dependant of a person in receipt of any of the previous categories can qualify

for VTOS. Where demand exceeds allocated places, applicants with lowest educational qualifications are given priority. In 2009 eligibility for VTOS was widened to include people in receipt of Farm Assist and the six month waiting period was waived for those who received statutory redundancy. Concessions were also made for persons receiving carer's allowance. Regrettably these positive developments were not matched by an increase in the number of places available nationally.

Even before the rhetoric of *knowledge economies* and *lifelong learning*, it was widely accepted in 1989 at the dawn of VTOS that education was (*and still remains*) an important prerequisite for the successful participation of an individual in modern society. Unemployment is characterised by workplace exclusion and social marginalisation resulting in economic deprivation and reducing self-worth. The provision of vocational training has been a principal instrument in the task of re-integrating the unemployed into the workplace, as a lack of appropriate training is a significant factor in unemployment. What made VTOS unique as a vocational training programme was that it was an educationally led vocationally orientated programme.

As a labour-market intervention according to Duggan *et al.* (1994: 1), the VTOS brief seeks to address a significant aspect of the labour-market disadvantage experienced by the long-term unemployed and to enhance the capacity for social equity in regard to education, training and employment opportunities. Educational disadvantage amongst the long-term unemployed is a consistent factor and concern. VTOS was unique in that it recognised the breadth and depth

of the problem of educational disadvantage amongst the unemployed and addressed the issue.

When VTOS was introduced, the Adult Education arena in Ireland was (*and still remains*) the least developed and under-resourced branch of education. VTOS has significantly contributed to a good practice model for adult education. The adult education landscape underwent a significant change particularly around the turn of the millennium and it has all been largely for the better. Adult educators moved from hero status to professional status with a number of important developments in adult education. Duggan *et al.* (1994: 3) recognised that by embracing an adult education philosophy which advocated a learner-centred approach to the design and delivery of provision, flexibility in responding to the needs of individuals and facilitating self-determination among participants, the benefits of such a programme as VTOS went way beyond those directly related to the labour-market.

This researcher's motivation in 2005 to pursue this research inquiry was in part driven by the irreconcilable fact that the continuing focus of VTOS was as a labour-market intervention in an economy of full employment and a vastly changed social climate to that of 1989 when VTOS had been established. This researcher's opinion at the time of setting out on this research inquiry was that VTOS was much more relevant as a social-inclusion measure, a view presented for discussion by Ronayne (2000: 18). Following the data collection phase of this research in June 2008, Ireland's economy and indeed most economies globally, deteriorated rapidly. Over the following twelve months Ireland's

unemployment soared at record pace, as evidenced in Table 1.2 (p.30). Ireland's number of unemployed in 2009 was more than twice that of 1989 when VTOS had been introduced.

The location of this scheme within vocationalism emerged from the pressing need to stop the cycle of long-term unemployment and to construct a skilled workforce available to the economy. The existing Vocational Education Committee (VEC) structure was used as the VTOS platform. VECs had already been creatively utilising their physical resource structures throughout the country. These had been created for Second-level mainstream education in Ireland, to facilitate adult education. Provision principally took the form of night classes, with some morning classes as well as facilitating programmes such as Post Leaving Certificate and Leaving Certificate Applied.

The term *vocationalism* suggests accountability to the needs of the economy and the needs were great after an economic battering during the 1980s. Vocational education was measured as to how well it prepared people for the world of work. Vocational training further focused this point, with many economic commentators and politicians then taking the view that a well trained workforce was essential to Ireland's economic survival and prosperity. This view continues in 2009, with the promotion of *the knowledge economy* and Policy Papers such as Building Ireland's Smart Economy (Government of Ireland, 2008).

This training required an investment and a return on that investment in the form of economically active contributors as workers and consumers in the economy.

In this regard VTOS served its purpose well in its first decade. Ireland reached full employment (*as defined by an unemployment rate less than or equal to five percent*) in 1999, a decade after the introduction of VTOS. As demonstrated in Diagram 1.2, Ireland remained at a stage of full employment for most of the second decade of VTOS, prompting a legitimate questioning of the need for a labour-market intervention at a time of continuing full employment. Fleming (2004: 12) asked *whether VTOS (in a country with historically low levels of unemployment) will continue to find a place in the new developments or will it be left to wither on the vine so to speak?*

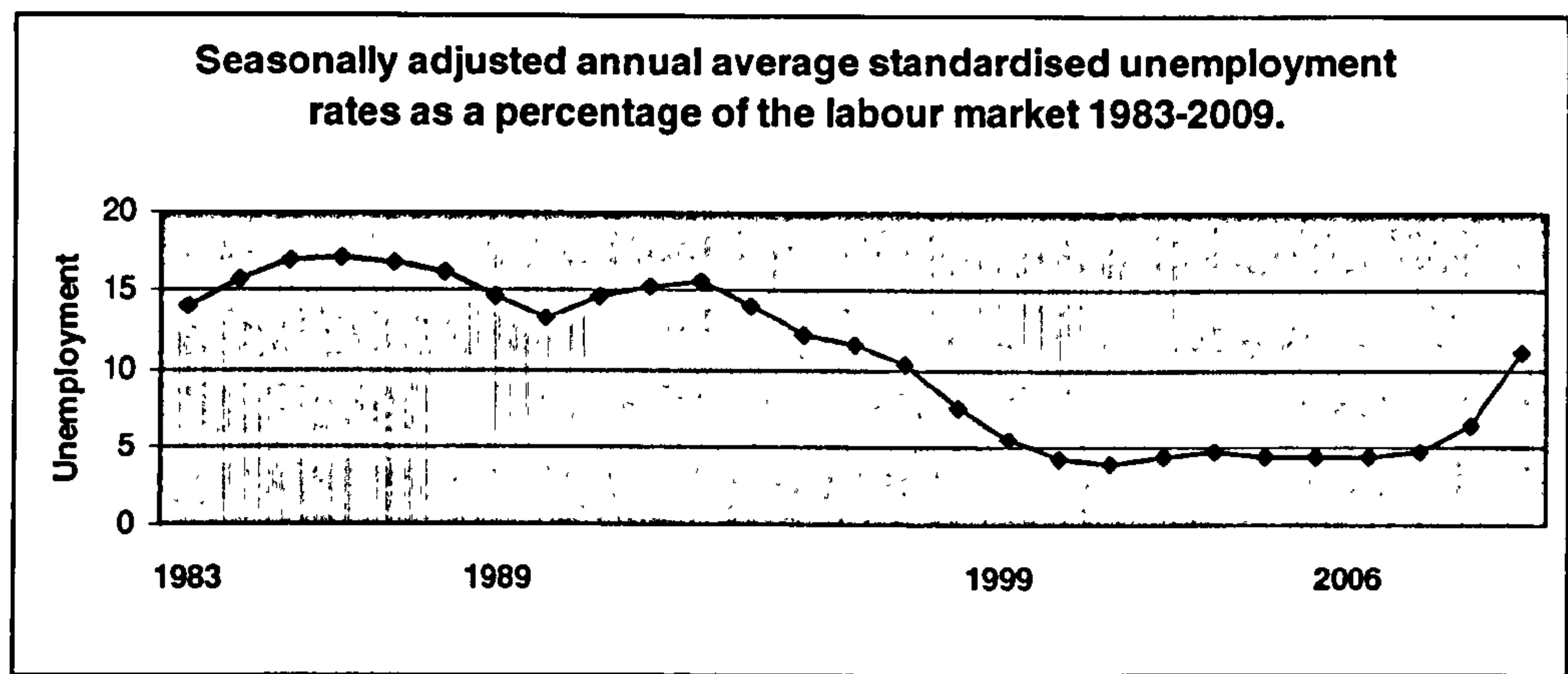


Diagram 1.2 *Standardised unemployment rates 1983-2009*

Source: Central Statistics Office of Ireland

This research was conducted over the period autumn 2006 to the summer of 2008 at a time of near full employment when VTOS was (*and still remains*) audited against a labour-market intervention benchmark. That benchmark needed review at that time, yet economic forces have quickly brought VTOS back to centre stage in Ireland’s efforts to address unemployment and to up-skill

adults as part of an overall strategy to develop a *smart economy* ready to take advantage of the next economic upswing, particularly given that there are more than double the adults unemployed now than there were before the introduction of VTOS. This fact is not reflected in Diagram 1.2 (p.24), as Ireland's labour-market doubled over the twenty years of VTOS from one million adults in employment in 1989 to a figure at its peak in 2008 of just over two million people in employment.

VTOS students are separated into two categories, *core* and *dispersed mode*, with this separation highlighted in Table 1.1 (p.19). Core students are those students in exclusively VTOS programmes in VTOS centres with dispersed mode students being those VTOS students who are dispersed into other programmes, usually PLC programmes. For the dispersed mode students, VTOS is little more than a funding option to facilitate their participation on a Further Education course. Core students have always been in the majority and at the time of this study, core students numbered approximately three thousand seven hundred and dispersed mode students numbered one thousand seven hundred, or an approximate ratio of 2:1. This research inquiry concentrates on core students exclusively. The VTOS programme is offered for up to two years, though a third year can be granted in exceptional circumstances.

VTOS delivers education and training programmes on the FETAC continuum from Levels One to Six on the National Framework of Qualifications presented in Diagram 1.3 (p.27), with the vast majority of students operating between Levels Three and Six, the greatest numbers of which are at Level Five. FETAC

is the Further Education and Training Awards Council and is the national awarding body for further education and training in Ireland. FETAC is a statutory accreditation body that gives people the opportunity to gain recognition for learning in education or training centres, in the work place and in the community. FETAC was established as a statutory body in 2001 by the Minister for Education and Science under the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999. FETAC's brief is to make quality assured awards in accordance with national standards within the national framework of qualifications thus creating progression opportunities and recognition of education and training achievements.

One of the strengths of VTOS is that the programme is unique to the location at which it is delivered and to the needs of the learners at that location. To give an example, a VTOS programme may be a Level Three basic adult education programme for adults relatively new to Ireland where English is not their first language. The concentration here would be on cultural integration, improving spoken and written English and on personal development to support adults in transition. Another example may be a Level Five Business Studies award for those wishing to pursue a career in business or wishing to start up businesses by themselves.

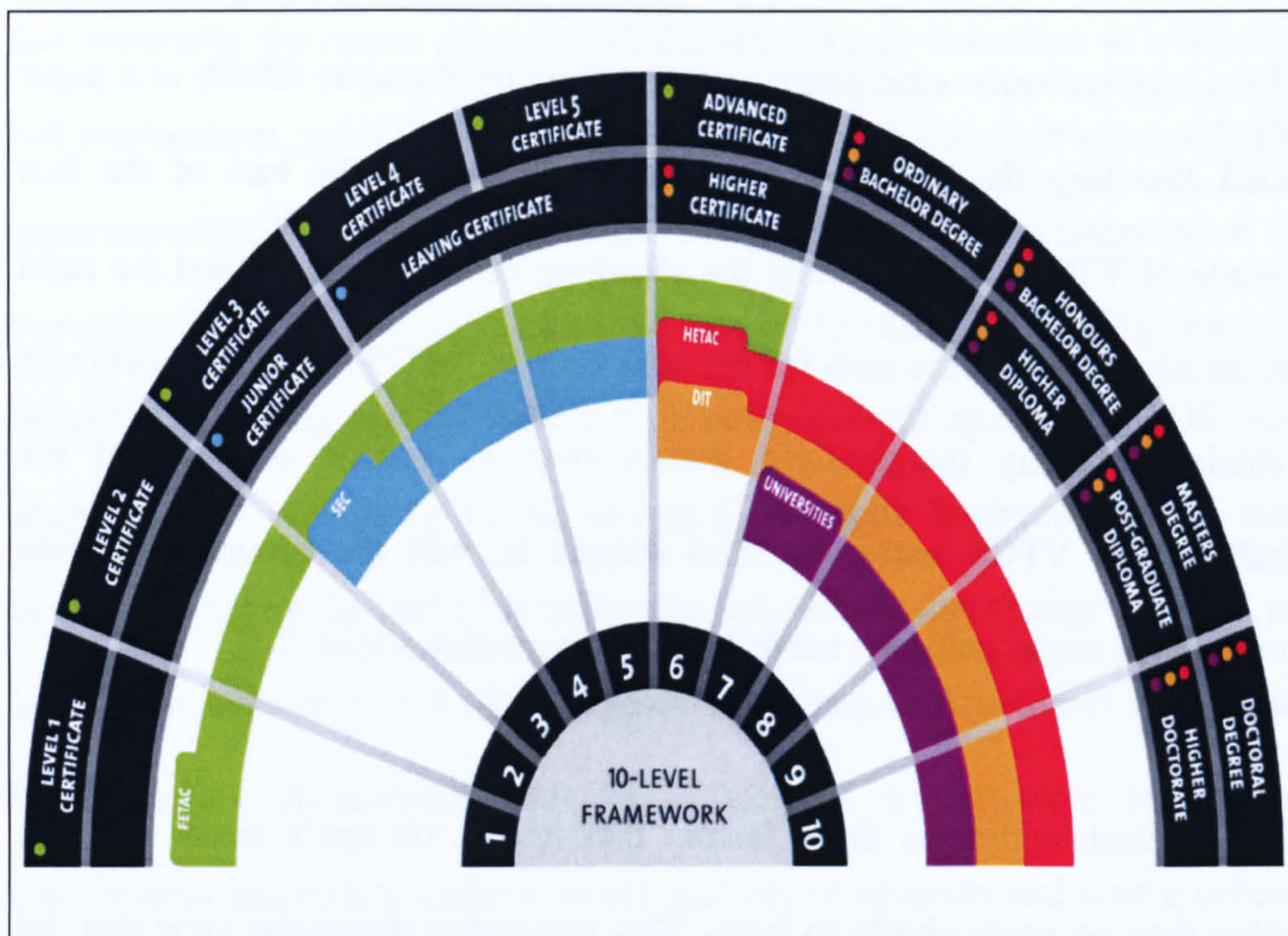


Diagram 1.3 *Irish national framework of qualifications*

This brief historical account of twenty years of VTOS has been a tale of two economic halves, the first a time of unemployment and the second a time of employment. The deteriorating economic conditions of 2009 may render this dichotomy irrelevant, yet the second decade of VTOS saw the emergence of VTOS as a social-inclusion measure. This social-inclusion measure provided the State with a valuable service of engaging many marginalised adults and bringing them into a more active role within our society as more active citizens. This particularly benefited the many adults who arrived from outside Ireland during the economic growth years of the *Celtic Tiger*. The benefits of this social-inclusion response went far beyond those which were economically measurable and enabled many vulnerable groups in our society to help themselves in their quest for a better life for themselves and their families.

This social-inclusion emergence was discussed by Ronayne (2000) in a paper titled *Reaching the Excluded* and was timely then at the turn of the first decade of VTOS in recognising the changing economic winds and the need for an adjustment of the sails for the next decade. VTOS served as a heuristic vehicle for many marginalised groups over its second decade and the challenge as VTOS enters its third decade is, will the economic agenda smother the social inclusive needs of our post-modern society?

This research addresses those factors that impact on one's desire to learn rather than on one's ability to learn. This researcher shares the view that the potential of every human is dependent on access to learning; formal, non-formal and informal. Knowledge enhances one's quality of life, it enables adults to learn new languages, train and retrain, acquire skills and to up-skill, attain qualifications needed for desired areas of work and realise a better standard of living for themselves and their families.

Jarvis (2007: 39) and Field (2006: 137) to name but two, believe the potential of every economy is in its human resource and the potential of every society is in its people. Central to this agreement between economy and society is the realisation that the core foundations of success are to be found in human potential of all ages, as potential is not confined to life stages. There is a societal responsibility and an economic need to create the learning spaces or opportunities to realise human potential and VTOS is one such opportunity for certain marginalised groupings in Irish society.

This researcher was mindful at the time of formulating this research proposal that nationally the *raison d'être* for VTOS was largely redundant at a time of full employment, yet VTOS was still alive and well. It was in this researcher's experience that VTOS had shifted from being a labour-market intervention to becoming more of a social-inclusion measure to meet a changing need in Ireland. Discussing this informally with colleagues, it appeared VTOS was adapting most effectively to this changed economic landscape. There was however a fear on the part of coordinators to highlight this change in focus, as VTOS was measured as a labour-market intervention. A national study with local insights of students and access motives would serve to inform practitioners and policy makers on the motives of students and start a debate anew, principally on provision and access thereof, as VTOS moves into its third decade.

The domestic and international economic landscape during this inquiry was shifting slowly in a negative direction as evidenced in Table 1.2 (p.30), yet there was a political and economic will to dampen negative comment. The economic deterioration became more dramatic in the second half of 2008, after the data collection phase of this research. To repeat, at the dawn of 2009 the numbers of people unemployed were higher than at the time VTOS commenced some twenty years previously. In 1989, according to the Central Statistics Office there were one million, one hundred thousand people in employment, with one hundred and ninety-seven thousand people unemployed and an unemployment rate close to eighteen percent. A more

historical account of unemployment rates in Ireland is offered in Diagram 1.2 (p.24).

Table 1.2 Irish labour-market			
Year (<i>June snapshot</i>)	2007	2008	2009
Employment levels	2,117,000	2,107,000	1,961,000
Unemployment levels	161,500	215,800	413,500
Standard Unemployment Rate (Seasonally adjusted % of labour-market)	4.5%	5.9%	11.9%

Source: Central Statistics Office (2009)

Clearly the rate of unemployment is still less than the eighteen percent of twenty years previous, yet the change in focus for VTOS provision has been sharp. This dramatic rise in unemployment demonstrated in Table 1.2 shows unemployment rates more than doubling over a two-year period. This rapid change resulted in VTOS centres being inundated with applications in 2009. Some forty VTOS coordinators contacted by this researcher in early 2009 stated there was over-demand for places available. VTOS is but one small training option at a time where over two hundred thousand additional adults have become unemployed over the twelve month period to June 2009. In this researcher’s fifteen years experience in VTOS, never before has there been such a dramatic increase in enquiries and application requests to join VTOS.

The relevance of this research inquiry is multi-faceted. Never before has a national inquiry with quantitative and qualitative strands sought to discover the motives of adult students to access VTOS. This multi methods and mixed

methods approach incorporating the vast majority of VTOS coordinators served to create a near-complete and insightful picture of VTOS provision nationally. This inquiry has caused many coordinators to look again at the profiles of students accessing their programme and the programmes offered to meet their needs. This researcher hopes that given the changing labour-market situation, the allocation of limited places will be formulated in a manner still mindful of the social-inclusion imperative which VTOS has addressed in the past, coupled with its *raison d'être* as a labour-market intervention.

The findings of this thesis have particular relevance to VTOS and may also be of interest to adult education provision outside of VTOS. The findings from these students could be applied to the wider adult education arena including Further Education and Third-level. Furthermore, the findings offer rich discursive material for our European adult education partners, where comparisons can be identified and discrepancies challenged or probed further.

Ethical considerations emerged at all stages of this inquiry, from formulating the research proposal, to writing up this thesis. Important for this researcher was the need to include a biography in this opening chapter, as rather than seeking to be a completely objective researcher, which according to Eisner (1993: 50) is an impossible position, this researcher wished to inform the reader of this researcher's positionality in a bid to present a more overt research account. Important too are the data collection process documents and findings presented in the appendices as they serve to further illuminate the

mixed process of data collection presented in Chapter Five and the mixed analysis of the data contained in Chapter Six.

A greater ethical consideration than process was the many hundreds of people who participated in this research process. This researcher's peers responded in large numbers to the survey invitation and in all cases were pleased to participate, as this research process was seen to promote inquiry into a scheme where a dearth of research existed. The coordinators perceived a value in this inquiry, meaning this task was recognised ethically as more than a research student's course activity. The process of researching coordinators proved more effective as a result of a number of pre-data collection piloting initiatives involving a small number of VTOS coordinators.

The highest ethical consideration was required for the VTOS student inquiry for a number of reasons. Firstly, VTOS students would have been involved in their programme for only a number of months in the majority of cases and their learning experiences and their knowledge of VTOS would be limited. Secondly, VTOS students are characterised by their association with welfare payments. This grouping is deemed amongst the most marginalised in Irish society. This group remains outside the workforce principally as it is unable to secure employment, with other profile reasons including disability or responsibilities as single parents.

The type of question asked and how the question was posited involved conscious considerations at all times to ensure that no student participant was

offended by this research experience. Piloting proved most important in ensuring that all questions were appropriate and that as far as possible, the student understood the nature of this inquiry.

Rather than this thesis having an ethical dimension, it is more an ethical undercurrent running through every phase of this process in a bid to ensure, as far as possible, an accurate and valid account, subject to the highest possible standards and conducted in a respectful and appreciative manner given the large number of people involved. The Open University *Research Methods in Education* Handbook (2001: 138) states that *sound ethical practices should be observed whatever kind of research one is engaged in*.

Theoretical perspectives in the conceptual form of a mixed methods strategy are applied to the research questions so as to map concepts. The literature reviewed in Chapter Two serves to illuminate the research questions. These questions are addressed through contextual themes which emerge through the literature reviewed and are directly considered in the data findings. Each chapter commences with a statement as to this researcher's interpretation of what is being discussed. This chapter now draws to a conclusion by offering a brief outline of the contents of the remaining chapters.

Chapter Two presents a literature review in a thematic form looking at conceptual areas of interest such as motivation as well as contextual matters such as the Irish adult education arena. This distinct review serves to critically and thematically review relevant literature and to place the reader in a more

informed position for the presentation of findings in Chapter Five. Given the dearth of literature specific to VTOS, parallel literature is also considered. This review serves to update the reader on relevant literature and to elaborate on important aspects of this inquiry, particularly in relation to the emerging themes in Chapter Six and concluding comments in Chapter Seven.

Chapter Three is dedicated to the research methodology and begins with the conceptual framework or map of this study which seeks to bring together each of the component parts of this research methodology. The conceptual framework is justified in terms of the purpose of this research inquiry and the philosophical underpinnings of this inquiry in the form of a pragmatic approach are introduced. The research strategy employed in the form of a sequential explanatory mixed methods strategy is considered beginning with an historic account of this relatively new research methodology termed *mixed methods*. This chapter links with the research questions presented in Chapter One, as this strategy emphasises the superiority of the research question over the methodology.

Chapter Four presents the data collection research story told through the research methods utilised to address this national inquiry. Presented in chronological order, this account highlights the positive and not-so-positive elements of this exciting part of the overall inquiry. From the quantitative large-scale research surveys to the qualitative focus groups and workshop, this chapter documents how the research strategy set out in Chapter Three was realised. The aims, challenges, disappointments and realisations of each

research method are discussed and provide a more transparent context for the research findings presented in Chapter Five.

Chapter Five, the largest chapter in this thesis, presents the raw findings of this research inquiry in four parts. The findings are presented in a complete and concise manner, given the significant volumes of data collected. Quantitative data are presented largely in numeric table format with supporting narrative. Qualitative data are offered verbatim for the most part. These findings are supported by more detailed accounts contained in the appendices.

Chapter Six presents an analysis and discussion of the findings of this inquiry in a thematic fashion and employs a mixed methods framework to the analysis. From *shaking off the taboos* to analysis of gender and age matters, findings from the various methods employed are interwoven under broad headings. Motivating factors and obstacles to accessing VTOS are explored through contrasting views from various research methods and from the viewpoints of both student and coordinator. This research inquiry discovered that the key motivators of adults to access VTOS included achieving qualifications leading to a job and to improving one's overall standard of education. The greatest obstacles to emerge from this study included; capacity and eligibility criteria of VTOS, low self-confidence or self-esteem on the part of the adult, pressure on personal finances, negative experience of initial schooling and fear.

Chapter Seven presents conclusions and recommendations arising from the findings of this inquiry. Cognisance is taken of the changes in economic circumstances during this inquiry and ideas worthy of discussion by relevant stakeholders are presented. This thesis concludes that whilst adults are truly idiosyncratic, the soft skills required by adults, society and our economy such as self-directed learning, communication skills and team working, are common to all adults. Thus, as evidenced through this inquiry and as advocated by the European Commission (CEC 2008), adults throughout their lives need access to learning opportunities, formal, non-formal and informal.

Chapter Two Literature review

Hart (1998: 13) defines a literature review as *the selection of available documents (both published and unpublished) on the topic, which contain information, ideas, data and evidence written from a particular standpoint to fulfil certain aims or express certain views on the nature of the topic, how it is to be investigated and the effective evaluation of these findings in relation to the research being proposed.*

In Chapter One, a number of research questions were posed. This chapter considers what the literature has to offer in providing a means to addressing these questions. In seeking to set out a firm foundation for advancing this research thesis, a key pillar is a review of the literature which illuminates matters of a conceptual nature and those of a contextual nature with sufficient emphasis placed on conceptual matters. This section then, just as with this thesis in its entirety, requires adherence to a theoretical framework true to a mixed methods design. Hart (1998: 39) outlines the challenge of literature boundaries and the potential conflicts therein. Conceptual and contextual boundaries emerged in the first instance through the research process, followed by thematic boundaries forming the framework of this literature review. The separation of contextual and conceptual matters is undertaken in a bid to ensure that the final thesis provides appropriate breadth and depth.

Initially, the conceptual underpinnings of motivation and adult education including andragogical considerations will be explored, followed by a series of contextual areas designed to shed greater light on this thesis. This review seeks to offer perspectives from different standpoints in a critical and thematic fashion consistent with further chapters of this thesis. Each of these themes provides a context for the specific research findings offered in Chapter Five and the analysis, conclusions and recommendations which follow thereafter.

Motivation

Adult motivation is that elusive topic rather like a *heffalump*, the fictional creature in A.A. Milne's *Winnie the Pooh* stories. All the characters know what a heffalump is and have an opinion. Yet nobody can quite describe one and nobody has ever seen one in the hundred acre wood. Motivation is that enigmatic topic which seeks to explain why people think and behave in a certain manner. More than a topic, it is a concept and a process for directing energy to achieve a thought goal, a survival tool for evolution and for progress. Motivation like the *heffalump* cannot be seen, felt or measured exactly in a reliable manner yet can be inferred and very much exists if only at best in a fuzzy manner. Educational psychologists have long advocated that motivation is an indispensable ingredient in the process of learning, yet that ingredient remains something of an enigma.

The word *motivation* comes from the Latin term *motivus*, which means *a moving cause*. Bergin *et al.* (1993: 437) define motivation as, *the physiological process involved in the direction, vigour and persistence of behaviour*. Skinner (1954: 87) perceives motivation as *the maintenance of desired behaviours in strength through reinforcement*. Bruner (1966: 125) believes *the will to learn exists in all people. It is intrinsically located in the learner and the will to learn is a motive that finds both its source and its reward in its own exercise*. Motivation is also affected by social and cognitive factors.

Handy (2004: 31) recognises motivation as *dedication and doggedness*, citing terms such as commitment, drive, passion, even obsession married with energy, hard work and tenacity. Murphy and Alexander (2000: 8) in their exploration of motivational terms offer a *corpus of terminology*, graphically presented in Diagram 2.1 (p.40).

Psychologists have contributed greatly to the development of theories on motivating adults. Sigmund Freud explored the influence of the subconscious mind on behaviour and introduced concepts such as transference in blocking or motivating learning. Freudianism identified deep inner drives as the major motivational force in adults, whereas another dominant theory of the early 1950s, namely *Behaviourism*, identified external environmental influences as the significant motivational emphasis. Freud (1923: 9) in seeking to explain motivation held that one is impelled to act by conscious and unconscious forces within.

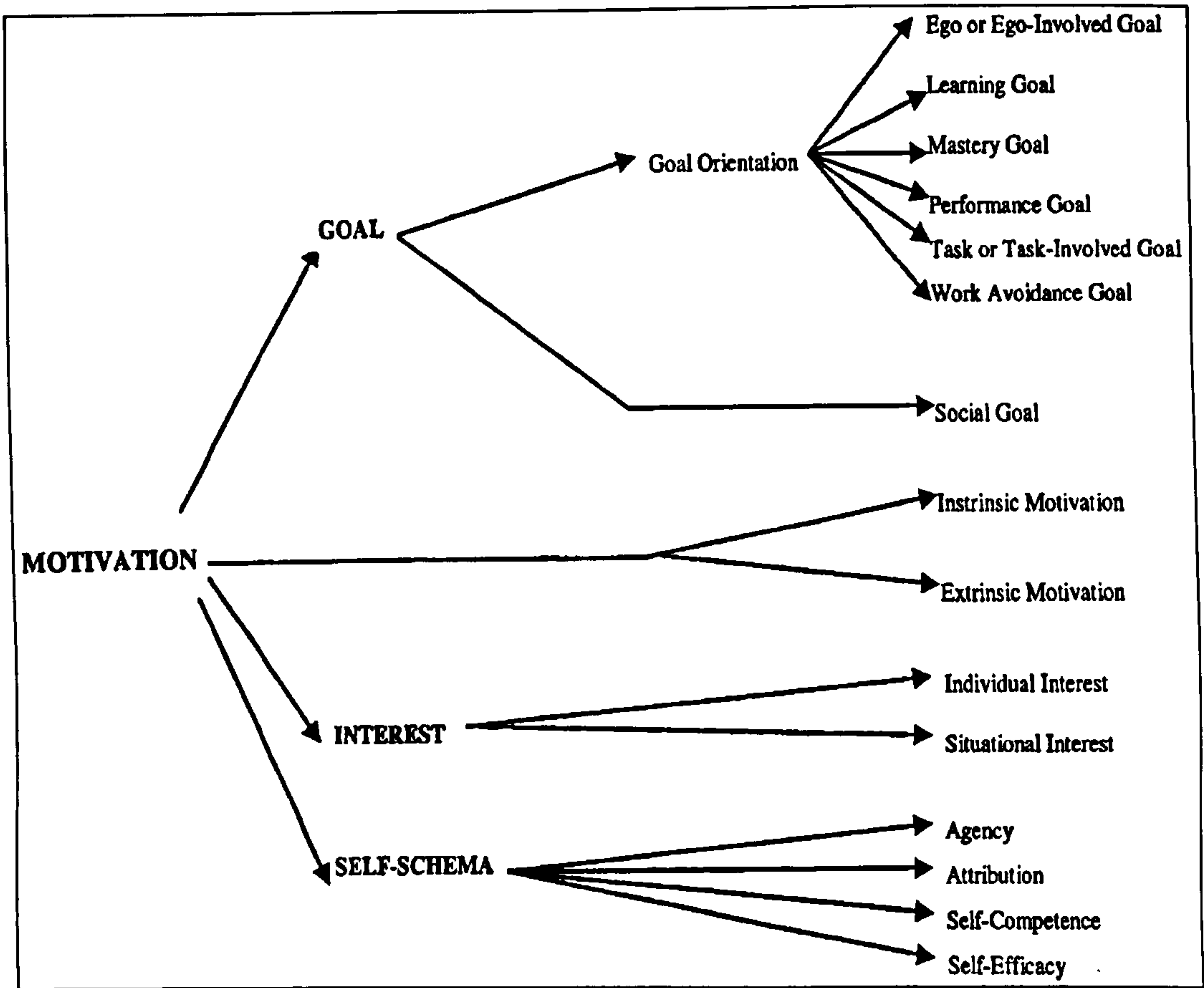


Diagram 2.1 Motivational terminology, Murphy and Alexander (2000)

A later movement of psychologists emerged principally because until then adults were treated as just another type of animal. Thus emerged new thinking psychologists, principally in the form of workplace psychologists; Abraham Maslow, Carl Rogers, Frederick Herzberg and Victor Vroom.

Maslow's (1943) *hierarchy of needs* model presented in Diagram 2.2 (p.41) offers self-actualisation or the facilitation of learners realising their full use of talents, capabilities and potentialities as the reason for engaging in learning and accessing education. This hierarchical needs-based approach suggests a higher level need cannot be met until the needs at the lower levels are

satisfied. Critics of the *hierarchy of needs* model question the individualised assumptions inherent in this model. Heylighen (1992: 45) suggests Maslow’s individualistic autonomous self-actualiser would not be considered well balanced in Eastern societies. Hanley and Abell (2002) argue that social connections are marginal to Maslow’s view of self-actualisation and Trigg (2004) highlights the isolation of the individual from culture and learning in Maslow’s model.

Maslow (1943) does however discuss the need to create safe spaces for adults to dare, to remove the crippling effect of fear and to enable adults to make choices, indeed to make the choice to access education. This *hierarchy of needs* model is useful in focusing attention on needs and recognising that adults are at different needs levels at different stages in their lives.

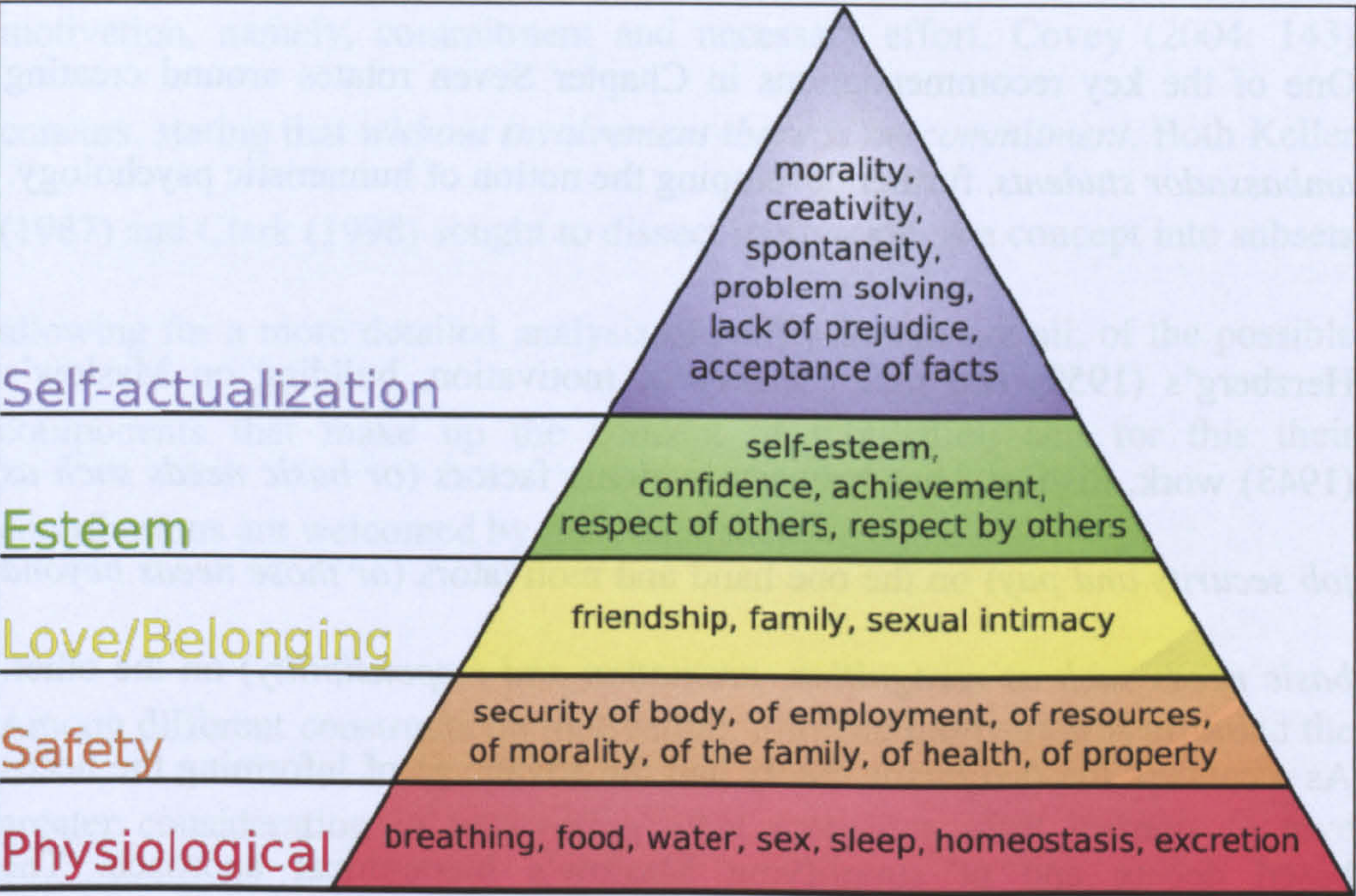


Diagram 2.2 Hierarchy of needs, Maslow (1943)

Rogers (1969) developed the notion of *humanistic psychology* which contained key elements relevant to adult motivation to access education, namely; personal involvement, self-initiation (*that discovery comes from within*), pervasiveness (*learning influences behaviour and attitudes of the learner*), evaluation (*the locus of evaluation resides within the learner*) and the essence of learning being meaning.

The pervasiveness element cannot be underestimated, as this intrinsic element brings about such positive change in adults. It encourages others, creating a domino effect in communities, for example within one's social network of friends or family, to access education for themselves. This was evidenced in both the quantitative and qualitative findings of this inquiry as well as by other studies, for example Heath *et al.* (2008) discussed later in this review. One of the key recommendations in Chapter Seven rotates around creating *ambassador students*, further developing the notion of humanistic psychology.

Herzberg's (1959) *two factor theory* of motivation, building on Maslow's (1943) work, distinguishes between hygienic factors (*or basic needs such as job security and pay*) on the one hand and motivators (*or those needs beyond basic needs such as recognition, promotion and responsibility*) on the other. As a concept the *two factor theory* had the advantage of informing the needs based debate and of simplifying Maslow's hierarchical approach. The appropriateness and value of the *two factor theory* is of limited benefit to this study. It does however concentrate on needs as a motivator which this researcher recognises and which is evidenced through this research inquiry.

Vroom's (1964) *expectancy theory* of workplace motivation is consistent with the andragogical approach to adult education. Expectancy theory posits that an individual's motivation is the sum of three factors; valence (*the value placed on the outcome*), instrumentality (*the probability that the outcome will be received given that certain outcomes have occurred*) and expectancy (*that certain effort will lead to outcomes that get rewarded*). Vroom's (1964) concentration on expectancy was a useful contribution to motivation theory in that it linked one's current effort with future positive outcomes. Whilst this discussion has concentrated on worker motivation, these theories have application beyond the workplace and into the adult education realm.

Keller (1987: 1) identified four components of motivation, namely; attention, relevance, confidence and satisfaction. Clark (1998: 39) developed a CANE (*Commitment And Necessary Effort*) model that identified two processes of motivation, namely, commitment and necessary effort. Covey (2004: 143) concurs, stating that *without involvement there is no commitment*. Both Keller (1987) and Clark (1998) sought to dissect motivation as a concept into subsets allowing for a more detailed analysis of some, though not all, of the possible components that make up the concept of motivation and for this their contributions are welcomed by this researcher.

Among different constructs on motivation, intrinsic motivation is afforded the greater consideration in uncovering what motivates adult learners to give education a second chance, where for some the first experience was a negative one. Knowles *et al.* (2005: 47) look at what motivates adults to learn in a bid

to discover whether an adult's motivation to learn can be extrinsic or intrinsic. Deci and Ryan (1985: 8) claim that humans act on their internal and external environments to be effective and to satisfy their needs. Intrinsic motivation is defined by Ryan and Deci (2000: 56) as *the motivation to engage in an activity for its inherent satisfactions rather than for some separable consequences*. Merrill (2002: 50) proposes *that the primary reward for the learner is learning itself*, i.e. when the learner is able to show a new skill or an improvement, he or she is fulfilled and better motivated.

Extrinsic motivation is described by Whang and Hancock (1994: 306) as *performing a task to get something outside of the activity*. For psychologists and sociologists, rewards, and indeed punishments, are seen as largely counterproductive as they undermine intrinsic motivation, a view supported through the qualitative inquiry recorded in Chapter Five.

Some economists, on the other hand, believe that individuals respond to incentives. Bénabou and Tirole (2003) seek to reconcile these views in a rational and scientific manner. Their findings uncover how performance initiatives offered by a teacher can adversely impact on a learner's perception of the task or of his or her own abilities. The view of Bénabou and Tirole (2003: 489) is that *incentives are weak reinforcers in the short-term and negative reinforcers in the long-term*. This researcher shares the view of Bénabou and Tirole (2003) in light of this research undertaken. Chapter Seven recommends a review and harmonisation of financial incentives particularly as they have been found to be potentially negative in the long-term.

Motivation theories discussed thus far maintain that individuals are innately motivated to learn and it may be concluded that motivation is overwhelmed by various obstacles. One of the key research questions in this thesis supports this hypothesis yet it requires further investigation. If such obstacles were removed, would adults be naturally motivated to engage with second chance education? Could motivation be a relational concept outside of an individual? A critical review of the literature on motivation appears to stigmatise people held *unmotivated*. Measures designed to motivate an interest in accessing learning may be very different to someone trying to overcome a hurdle, for example transport. Learner motivation to engage is; complex, changeable over time, subject to a variety of environmental factors and idiosyncratic. To illustrate the point, for one person with low literacy and numeracy levels, fear of taking the first step may prove an insurmountable obstacle and for another person merciless teasing by peers has been found to be a motivator.

A more specific definition on motivation offered by Vroom (1964) is *of a process governing choices made by people or lower organisms among alternative forms of voluntary activity*. A difficulty with this definition is how voluntary is the activity? McGivney (2004: 42) maintains that mature students tend to be more motivated than younger students for a number of reasons, such as; the course is something they have long wanted to do, sacrifices made to participate, to prove to themselves and others their ability to achieve, and/or because career promotion requires further education.

This distinction is a blurred one at best as it applies only to some mature students due to the idiosyncratic nature of motivation, and some younger students too wish to prove their abilities to themselves and their peers. Furthermore, younger students very much recognise the link between education, career and quality of life. Thus motivation and more particularly adult student motivation is not unproblematic or uniform, yet that is not grounds to dismiss further exploration of this topic.

Motivation is also influenced by cultural relativity. Hofstede (1980) in a study of some forty countries found that using four dimensions of national culture labelled; power-distance, uncertainty-avoidance, individualism–collectivism and masculinity–femininity, found common national elements or national norms. Whilst this study is dated and specific to the workplace, Hofstede (1980: 56) recognised the shifting emphasis to the humanisation of work, through job enrichment programmes and the effort to make work more intrinsically satisfying.

Wlodkowski (2008: 112) offers a motivational framework for culturally responsive teaching, advocating that intrinsic motivation is inseparable from culture. This model centres on learner's current experience and whilst theoretically pleasing, its practical application becomes strained in class group settings. The model is very much a long-term contract between tutor and students. What is useful with the model is the capacity to create a common culture that all learners in a learning situation can accept. In a bid to explore

deeper the historical development of motivation theories, the following categories set out in Diagram 2.3 are offered by Ahl (2006: 387).

<i>Humans as:</i>	<i>are motivated by:</i>
1. <i>Economic / Rational</i>	<i>Rewards and punishments</i>
2. <i>Social</i>	<i>Social norms, groups</i>
3. <i>Psycho-biological</i>	<i>Instinct and drives</i>
4. <i>Learner</i>	<i>Stimuli and/or rewards</i>
5. <i>Need-driven</i>	<i>Inner needs</i>
6. <i>Cognitive</i>	<i>Cognitive maps</i>

Diagram 2.3 *Motivational categorisations, Ahl (2006)*

Ahl’s (2006) contribution enhances the literature by presenting dimensions of motivation through the exploration of human facets and further supports this researcher’s findings of adult students as idiosyncratic. Ahl (2006) suggests that motivation is a relational concept, rather than residing within the individual, and challenges the prevailing assumption that education is the most obvious response to societal problems. Ahl (2006: 385) in her article title asks; *motivation in adult education: a problem solver or a euphemism for direction and control?*

Cross (1981: 124) offers an interesting conceptual framework on the theory of adult motivations for learning, worthy of further exploration. The framework presented was developed largely from the influence of four researchers: (a) Miller’s (1967) *Force Field Analysis*, (b) Rubenson’s (1977) *Expectancy–*

Valence Paradigm, (c) Boshier's (1973) *Congruence Model* and (d) Tough's (1979) *Anticipated Benefits Model*. All four models are by no means complete theories but they do have many commonalities; interaction between an individual and the environment can be understood and analysed, positive and negative forces exist drawing on the work of Lewin (1947), individuals have some control over their destinies, individuals are also group members and finally individuals have hierarchical needs, drawing on Maslow's (1943) work. Cross (1981) explores the model of self-directed learning defined by Tough (1979: 6) as *a series of related episodes where in each episode more than half of a person's total motivation is to gain and retain certain fairly clear knowledge and skill, or to produce some other lasting change in oneself*.

Cross (1981: 124) offers a *Chain of Response Model* which evolved from the four models just discussed and is set out in a seven stage process. Each stage is a link starting with the individual and finishing with external factors. The more positive the experience at each stage, the more likely the individual will progress through the links of the chain towards the last stage, which is the decision to participate. The model is useful in that it brings together a number of elements in a systematic way. Furthermore, it emphasises the interaction between elements and rejects simplistic explanations.

The model is, however, not without its weaknesses. The linearity of the model is over-emphasised and the systematic approach offered is problematic given that in this researcher's observation, things often happen simultaneously, elements are jumped and matters cannot be assumed to always move in a

logical order, leading to a suggestion that a more zig-zagged and less linear model may be more appropriate. Owing to the human nature of motivation, at best it can provide a snapshot of the interactive relationship at a particular time between an adult learner and their environment, recognising the uniqueness of each person and their internal and external life processes. Thus, at best, themes of adult motivation to participate supported by narrative insights are offered in Chapter Five, with analysis in Chapter Six.

Motivation research has suggested that when students engage in a task enthusiastically with the aim of mastering it or when they believe it to be useful, greater learning results. Wlodkowski (2008: 96) maintains that to better understand motivation requires the perception of adults thinking and emotions as inseparable from each other and from the social context in which the activity takes place. Integrated models of learning incorporating motivational, cognitive and volitional components have been advocated by motivational theorists such as Ablard and Lipschultz (1998) and Valle *et al.*, (2003). This researcher's focus is not with motivation towards better learning but towards accessing learning. However, reference to learning is appropriate given the purpose of accessing a return-to-learning programme.

The trajectory of one's motivating factor is important too, as long-term goals can affect short-term activities and not always in a positive manner. What should be appropriate to all adult learners is that motivation improves ability, which improves motivation, which improves ability and which creates an endless cycle of potential within each adult learner. Wlodkowski (2008: 101)

bridges the gap between intrinsic and extrinsic motivating factors at least partially in his suggestion that adult motivation to learn is the sum of four factors; success (*to be successful learners*), volition (*to have a choice in their learning*), value (*to learn things they value*) and enjoyment (*to have pleasurable learning experiences*).

Covey (2004: 35) claims the potential for growth and change in the motivation of an individual is possible due to the fact that human behaviour is distinguishably characterised by its developmental goal-directed process. As learning rests within the learner as opposed to the education provider, the locus of control should as far as possible rest within the learner. Where learners perceive that the power to make learning decisions rests within themselves, they will be much more motivated towards realising the potential of those decisions, for example to sign up for a VTOS course. Thus adult learners need to be at ages and stages of their life trajectories appropriate to be agreeable to being motivated, as adult education centres and all their resources can do little if the adult is not willing to be at least somewhat motivated. Jarvis (1987: 16) states that learning starts with experience and the reasons people become motivated to learn are just as important as the opportunities for learning themselves.

Broadly speaking, from a review of the literature, educational psychologists agree on three major sources of motivation in adults accessing education: firstly, intrinsic satisfaction (*the learner's natural interest*); secondly, extrinsic reward (*the provider or tutor*); and finally, success in the task or process

(*combining satisfaction and reward*). Motivation to participate can depend on specific behaviour intentions which are determined by two cognitive factors; attitude to behaviour and subjective norms. What are the VTOS students' underlying beliefs that promote or hinder accessing VTOS? Intentions mentioned by students in the data collection phase are assumed to capture the motivational factors such as willingness, effort and persistence to perform the behaviour.

It is suggested that intentions are determined by two variables. First, attitudes towards the behaviour (e.g. *doing X would be good or bad*), and second, by subjective norm or perceived social pressure to perform it (*people who are important to me think that I should do X*). Attitude is the individual learner's evaluation as to whether the behaviour is positive or negative. One's targeted behaviour and the evaluation of the consequences of that behaviour are discussed in Vroom's (1964) *Expectancy Theory*.

Salient normative beliefs underpin subjective norms. Normative beliefs refer to an individual's perception of what most people (*i.e. reference groups*) think about the particular behaviour, activity or event. The importance of a reference group will influence an individual's motivation to comply. Personal agency (*or the formation of an intention*) is only part of the process of accessing adult education. Personal resources and environmental determinants play an important part in the processes of accessing adult education.

Bandura (1977: 212) found that adult behaviour is strongly influenced by confidence in the capability to perform. Given that one of the findings of this thesis is that a significant number of students on VTOS have a low sense of self-confidence as learners, it makes their sense of achievement in even accessing the VTOS programme all the more noteworthy. Motivation to participate is also influenced by experience. Andragogy recognises life experience in the adult student and Jarvis (2006: 81) emphasises one's framework of experience as having a strong influence over the whole learning experience, including seeking to access it. This ties in with Wlodkowski's (2008: 112) motivational framework for culturally responsive teaching previously discussed.

Concluding comment on motivation

A series of concepts and models on addressing motivation have been offered and many others were considered in the construction of this particular conceptual theme of this thesis. Carefully selected definitions were inserted to further inform the reader on this theme and parallel positions were offered to give the review sufficient balance. Many of the concepts presented emerged from what were perceived as weaknesses in earlier concepts and all of the concepts presented have their critics.

It is the view of this researcher that motivation as a concept is a heaving ocean and as an application too it is awash with rich yet often dissimilar ideas, principally because of conflicting understandings of human behaviour. Within the literature reviewed, human behaviour is cast as rational and irrational,

materialistic and spiritual, pragmatic and altruistic, individualistic and communal, self- and other-directed and, in a bid to reconcile the views, idiosyncratic. This complexity of human behaviour has led to the formulation of a rich literature on intrinsic motives where by comparison there is a dearth of literature on extrinsic motives.

Possible reasons for this dearth may include some of the following: firstly, it appears that extrinsic motivators such as the need for qualifications seem to be taken as certain, and this hypothesis is confirmed in this inquiry; secondly, extrinsic motivators are more tangible and more easily evidenced, leading to less conflicting discussion of extrinsic values. A third point is that extrinsic motivators alone are at best positive in the short-term and are potentially damaging in the long-term. The literature demonstrates that valuable learning can be achieved from further investigation of intrinsic motivation such as recent studies by Wlodkowski (2008).

This researcher concludes that the literature reviewed represents motivation as a contested construct with debatable empirical support and a bias towards a Western individualistic view of society, espousing economic and political values over social values. This thesis is striving to answer the question; what motivates eligible adults to access or enrol on VTOS? This researcher is of the opinion that motivation is a pattern of motives situated between the intrinsic and extrinsic orientations discussed thus far.

Motives have characteristics consistent with the human nature of motivation. Motives are plural, variable and contingent on one's life context. Motives for one learner may not be appropriate for another, for example, those intrinsically motivated by achievement and those externally motivated by affiliation. Motives too are contingent upon an adult's stage in their lifespan and life context.

Adult education

Keogh (2004: 18) identifies adult education as *publicly-funded provision for adult learning in statutory and other agencies, outside of the statutory training sector* and this researcher intends to use this statement as a definition for adult education for the purposes of this research. Adult Education as defined by the Department of Education and Science (2000: 27) is *systematic learning undertaken by adults who return to learning having concluded initial education or training*. European Commission publications particularly since 1996, the European Year for Lifelong Learning, such as the Memorandum on Lifelong Learning (2000), *Commission Working Paper*, present adult education as everything described as basic and continuing education and assisted learning for youths and adults, formal, non-formal and informal. This all-inclusive term covers anything not counted as school or university education or initial vocational training for young people or adults.

Merriam and Brockett (1997: 8) define adult education theoretically, as *activities intentionally designed for the purpose of bringing about learning among those whose age, social roles, or self-perception defines them as adults*. Youngman (2000) looks at adult education and its place in today's society. Does it really empower marginalised groups? Is it a contributor to democracy? Youngman's ideological discourse is critical and encourages a move away from a functionalist perspective. Influencers such as Karl Marx and Paulo Freire support the theme that State adult education constitutes an area in which struggles for ideological hegemony are carried out.

Freire (1995) gives great insight into progressive practice in education, towards a dialogical and informal mode as opposed to a curriculum-based and more formal mode of education. Freire's association with liberation through educational practice sits well in the realm of adult education. However the pure thoughts of Freire could be accused of being more rhetoric today, rather than the basis for quality education provision. Wlodkowski (2008: 24) believes that adult education as a field of study and advocacy *has been a driving force for increasing adults' access to and success in post-Secondary education*, a view evidenced through the work of VTOS.

Dewey (1905) made a significant contribution to all educational thinking in the twentieth century believing that education must engage with and enlarge experience, encourage individual thinking and be a continuous reconstruction of living experience. Dewey (1905) claimed democracy has to be born anew each generation and education is its midwife. Dewey (1905) like Lave and

Wenger (1991) felt learning centres should be miniature communities and embryonic societies, challenging the view of psychological explanations of learning in favour of more social explanations.

This social explanation is elaborated on by Wenger (1999) in *Communities of Practice*. Social theories have been used to describe and explain learning in workplace and community settings. This approach, whilst acknowledging and appreciating the contribution of formal learning, proposes that people learn in a range of ways and settings. Johnson *et al.* (1998: 14) argue that effective learning takes place when groups or communities cooperate towards reaching shared learning goals, with people belonging to an overlapping and sometimes conflicting set of communities.

This ties in with Smith and Spurling's (2001) concept of *salient self* and the manner in which one behaves in given settings. Smith and Spurling (2001: 114) assert that the levels of learning motivation displayed by individuals reflect their social, economic and family experience and despite this experience, every healthy person can, in principle, rise to high levels of motivation to learn. Furthermore at every point in society, practical steps can be taken to significantly improve learning motivation.

This is not new thinking. Whilst Karl Marx did not write specifically on the topic of education, his analysis of the class-based nature of society and how it was rooted in education amongst other areas of society has an influence on what Lave and Wenger (1991) perceive as a community. Heath *et al.* (2008:

221) in a study of educational decision making evidenced one's social network as influential in the complex process of decision making. Furthermore a recurring link was found between educational decisions and the quality of personal relationships within social networks, emphasising the importance of social networks for adults considering adult education. This thesis discovered evidence that one's social network can positively influence an adult's decision to participate in formal adult education through encouragement and one's social network may indeed prove an obstacle if there is discouragement emerging from within one's social network.

Furthering the discussion on adult education, Knowles *et al.* (2005: 36) conclude that the science of adult education developed as a result of studies by Thorndike (1928) and later by Sorenson (1938) where scientific evidence proved first that adults could learn. Previous to this, mere faith in adult ability to learn is all that existed. A second stream of inquiry sought to discover how adults learn and Lindeman's (1926) work is widely regarded as the foundation of this strand of inquiry. Lindeman's (1926) principles still deserve attention today - principles such as; the learner at the centre of all considerations, the learner's personal experience is the resource of highest value and obstacles to original thinking have no place in adult education.

The formalisation of adult education in Ireland began in the late 1970s with the appointment of Adult Education Organisers (AEOs), yet there were no adult education budgets until the middle 1980s, as the economic conditions meant little investment in adult education. Schemes emerged, most notably

VTOS, Youthreach and Senior Traveller Training Centres (STTCs). Adult Literacy Organisers and Community Education Facilitators were appointed and these measures introduced *champions* to develop adult education provisions to meet local needs.

Improved Government revenues through the 1990s allowed for real delivery and changed lives for many individuals. Ireland's first Government minister with responsibility for lifelong learning was appointed in 1997, paving the way for further improvements. The Further Education section of the Department of Education and Science was created in 2000 to administer budgets outside of mainstream education.

One of the positive developments in recent years was the introduction of the Back To Education Initiative (BTEI) in 2002 which introduced part-time Government-funded learning opportunities for adults, which were flexible and innovative in their delivery. Another positive was the launch of an Adult Guidance Service nationwide, providing greater support for adult learners. Adult education centres emerged in their own right creating a space for adults and a greater presence in the community. Unfortunately many of the adult education centres became located in the mainstream cast-offs, yet these unattractive old buildings were transformed into welcoming learning spaces.

Given the rapidly changed fortunes in Government revenues during the decade of the *Celtic Tiger* from the early 1990s, consultation, agreement and legislation, most notably in the form of the White Paper on Adult Education in

2000, appeared to move adult education from the ad-hoc, hedge school, hero and voluntary arena into a more mainstream, professional and sustainable arena.

With economic prosperity came economic demands. The Department of Education and Science (2000) White Paper, like previous Government reports into adult education in Ireland such as Kenny (1983) and Murphy (1973), acknowledged adult education as a contributor to supporting individuals and their personal development. However the economic agenda appears throughout the White Paper (2000) in a way that did not occur in previous reports and it was not surprising given the welcome economic demands for a more skilled labour supply.

Whilst acknowledging the need for adult education to serve the needs of the economy, it should not be at a cost to society. Adult education in Ireland needs to remind itself of where it originated from and why there was a need for it in the first place, long before the rhetoric of *lifelong learning* emerged. *The journey is the reward*, (Chinese proverb).

Murphy (1973: 2) stated that *adult education has a particularly critical and difficult role to play in a rapidly changing society if it is to seek to provide information, knowledge, skills and attitude to change which people may need in order to cope with changing conditions of individual, social and communal living*. Kenny (1983: 11) submits that *at this time of rapid change, adult education is not a luxury but an essential*. These historic comments on adult

education evoke the phrase *plus ça change, (plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose – the more things change, the more they stay the same)*.

Concluding comment on adult education

Adult education in Ireland has never before been such a contested space, principally as it never had so much to lose. As our small open economy in 2009, the 20th year of VTOS, tries to deal with both a national and a global recession, will the gains of recent years in adult education now simply be eroded and whom will the reducing adult education provision serve? Will the economic need for greater accreditation and reducing budgets damage the education provision and the learning opportunities for adults in Ireland? The value of education has been recognised since the evolution of the human being. *The educated differ from the uneducated as much as the living from the dead*, (Aristotle).

Lifelong learning

Having just considered the theme of adult education, a question arises; is lifelong learning adult education? Of course not, yet having reviewed much Irish and European literature on policy relevant to this thesis, often these terms are treated as tantamount. In practice, having attended many conferences on lifelong learning, rarely would one find practitioners from the

Primary or Second-level education systems and in fact only certain specialist staff from the Third-level education spectrum would be likely attendees.

Lifelong learning emerged as a concept as the realisation dawned globally, but particularly in the Western world, that initial education was no longer sufficient for the life trajectory of adults. Lifelong learning grew out of the need for modern economies to up-skill their labour-markets in an attempt to further develop their economies. Up-skilling was also required to compensate for the loss in traditional low-skill manufacturing which is a consequence of developing economies moving up the economic value chain.

Boshier (1998: 4) describes lifelong learning as another form of human resource development. Edgar Faure (1972) of UNESCO takes a similar economic viewpoint espousing knowledge, intellectual property rights and research and development as key ingredients in developing first world economies and lifelong learning was part of the answer for all first world countries. Lynch (2009: 8) highlights *that in a globalised geo-political order knowledge, particularly credentialised knowledge, determines opportunities and education is a distributor of privilege.*

In policy terms, lifelong learning was advocated as a means of enhancing economic productivity and competitiveness, of attracting foreign direct investment and of nurturing an entrepreneurial and innovative economy responsive to global changes. Lifelong learning was further offered as a means for improving social-inclusion, fairness, personal development and enhancing

cultural cohesion. Regrettably, recent history shows that lifelong learning as a policy is high on rhetoric and self-destructive in its narrow focus.

Thus there is theory and practice that seem to question the linguistic differences. The Department of Education and Science (2000: 32) refer to a continuum of education from *the cradle to the grave*, but this is an unfortunate trap, as it effectively amounts to a policy for lifelong education, an impossible task. The European Union policy documents do not fall into the same trap. For example, the CEC (2000 & 2001) treat lifelong learning as a form of education, policy can be made about specific education. Lifelong learning according to the CEC (2001: 9) embraces all learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competences within a personal, civic, social and/or employment related perspective.

This starting from the self-use of the term *learning* is visionary and radical in that it shifts the emphasis from the provider of education to the learner. One can be in a classroom and learn nothing or be outside the classroom and learn a great deal. Lifelong learning displaced the earlier term of lifelong education. One reason offered for the change was the implication of being imprisoned in a global life classroom. A more likely reason is that it was politically convenient, by shifting responsibility from the provider to the learner.

Lifelong learning as Government policy, particularly in Western societies, deserves further caution. Often that which is offered as a political solution may be a convenient consensus which suits some interest groups but fails to

deliver for those who need it most. For example the Irish Governments' Policy Paper *Building Ireland's Smart Economy* (Government of Ireland, 2008) emphasises an increase in those pursuing doctoral studies (Level Ten on the NFQ). According to the Fás National Skills Bulletin 2009, twenty-five percent of the Irish workforce hold qualifications of honours degree level (Level Eight) or higher. An almost equal twenty-three percent hold Junior Certificate (Level Three) or less, yet where is the emphasis for these workers? Furthermore where is the national strategy for the more than four hundred thousand adults seeking to get back into the workforce?

Coffield (1999) rejects the consensus that lifelong learning is a solution to social and political ills and challenges the inherent *human capital theory*, which is offered politically as *upskilling the workforce*. This consensus amounts to an over-concentration on individual credentialised human capital which neglects other forms of capital, for example social and cultural. Ahl (2006: 402) takes a critical view of lifelong learning as a necessary political response to economic and technological determinism, demonstrating that the political discourse of lifelong learning constructs adults as inadequate. Coffield (1999: 485) attributes the popularity of the consensus to short term politically convenient initiatives and access to money, as it legitimates increased expenditure on education.

Coffield (1999: 486) offers alternative visions of lifelong learning in terms of a personal development model and a social learning model and warns of the potential of lifelong learning as a form of social control. Illeris (2003a) too is

critical of lifelong learning and political vested interests. Research on lifelong learning in Denmark evidenced that far from being a project of emancipation, lifelong learning demonstrated the character of compulsory mass education serving the narrow Government policies of the labour-market. Whilst not compulsory by law but perceived as by necessity, Illeris (2003a: 13) discovered that the majority of participants entered adult education programmes because they felt more or less forced to do so and not because of inner drives or interest. Illeris (2003b: 405) claims that if the optimistic promises of lifelong learning are to be fulfilled, then measures other than administrative and financial incentives must be utilised, for example measures that take into account the psychological situations of the learners.

Thus the term lifelong learning arouses positive connotations but is vague, in need of shaping and comes with a cautionary note. Field (2006: 48) points out that lifelong learning is a re-badging away from lifelong education to lifelong learning. The European Union and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, for example, adopt a broad definition for lifelong learning, whereas in the U.K. the concept is much more narrowly defined.

In each case definitions are evolving, for example, a report by the European Association for the Education of Adults by Toth *et al.* (2006: 5) recognised that deep philosophical differences about values and priorities were reflected in the use and connotation of different terms and definitions. Thus it makes sense that broadly representative bodies would adopt more broad definitions.

Lifelong learning is defined by Jarvis (2006: 134) as *the combination of processes throughout a lifetime whereby the whole person - body (genetic, physical and biological) and mind (knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, emotions, beliefs and senses) - experiences social situations, the perceived content of which is then transformed cognitively, emotively or practically (or through any combination) and integrated into the individual person's biography resulting in a continually changing (or more experienced) person.*

The concept of lifelong learning originated as lifelong education and, as already stated, is not new. It was found in ancient writings and was explored by early European educationalists such as Comenius and Arnold, and by early philosophers such as Plato. Yeaxlee (1929) provided the first important and comprehensive articulation of lifelong education, which offered an intellectual basis for a comprehensive understanding of education as a continuing aspect of everyday life. Central to Yeaxlee's (1929) writing was the belief that not only should education carry on throughout life, education is also part of living with an emphasis placed on non-formal learning and life experience.

Lifelong education evolved into lifelong learning during the second half of the twentieth century and perhaps the publication which best articulates this movement was prepared by Faure (1972). Central to his case were two fundamental ideas; lifelong education and the learning society, the first idea laying the foundations for the second idea. These ideas however, were not well received politically as responsibility would have rested with

Governments to provide education systems for citizens' lives, as Bell (1996: 155) noted.

The Oxford English Dictionary (2001) defines learning as *the acquisition of knowledge or skills through study, experience or being taught*. It is a unique, internal, cognitive process which can occur in a variety of settings. Of course an educational environment is one such setting. Education on the other hand is defined by the same dictionary as *the process of giving intellectual, moral and social instruction*. Much has been written about lifelong learning, Knowles (1984), Mezirow (1990), Field (2006) and Jarvis (2006), (2007) (2008) to name but a few and with each perspective comes further twists and complications.

Mezirow (1990) presents a view of the adult learner that is solipsistic, where learning remains something that individuals do. Left discourse about social movements as learning sites appears to be at odds with this view. As previously mentioned, Lave and Wenger (1991) and Johnson *et al.* (1998), for example, offer a learning society viewpoint as does Jarvis (2007). Locally, the Department of Education and Science (2000) provide a framework to conceptualise lifelong learning, through the core principles set out concerning adult education, namely; a systematic approach, equality and interculturalism.

In all first world countries there has been a move away from a belief of initial education and training as sufficient for adult life, towards notions of lifelong

and life-wide learning of a formal, non-formal and informal nature. A further distinction between education and learning offered by Merriam and Brockett (1997: 5) claims that learning can occur both incidentally and in planned educational activities, where only the planned educational activities are termed education. Politically, as mentioned, there has been a convenient shift in language from education to learning and lifelong learning over the past two decades. This subtle shift has served to convince citizens that they are responsible for their own learning and development, in our knowledge-focused Western world. A sceptic might say this learning focus absolved Governments from any responsibility towards providing education systems for its citizens' lifetimes. Therefore, lifelong education is the system and lifelong learning is the goal and the result.

Thus learning and education are very different processes and it is important to realise that today we deliver an education system within which we provide for learning. There is a subtle, but important difference between education and learning; mutually integrated, yes, but similar processes, no. Adult education emphasises the provider where the responsibility for designing activities to effect change in the knowledge, skill and competence of adults rests with the educator. Adult-learning by contrast emphasises the learner, where adult-learning could be defined as *the act or process by which knowledge, skills and competence are acquired by the adult learner*. In VTOS it may be described as an unwritten contract; the VTOS providers educate (adult education) and the VTOS learner learns (lifelong learning). *Wisdom begins in wonder*, (Socrates).

Concluding comment on lifelong learning

Learning underlies our humanity and the right to an education is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Thus this researcher sets out from the premise that the right to learn throughout one's life is a human right. Lifelong learning as a concept then for this researcher is about opportunities of a formal, non-formal and informal nature. Those opportunities are influenced largely by political and economic stakeholders and Jarvis (2008: 3) states that if our learning society is not a just society, then it is incumbent upon us to explore how it can become one. Lifelong learning has many demands to satisfy, principally of an economic and social nature. These competing themes are explored later in this literature review.

Andragogy

Described as the science of adult education and the art of helping adults learn, this concept pioneered by Malcom Knowles is best understood when the term pedagogy is discussed. Pedagogy is the art and science of teaching children and the pedagogical approach to motivation suggests that learners are motivated to learn by external motivators such as results, teacher approval or disapproval and parental pressure. The andragogical model takes a different view on motivation. Knowles *et al.* (2005: 68) maintain that adults are responsive to some external motivators such as better jobs and higher salaries, but the most potent motivators are internal pressures such as the desire for increased job or life satisfaction, self-esteem and quality of life. Adults are

motivated to learn as they experience needs and interests that learning will satisfy. Their orientation to learning is life-centred and the life experience which adults bring to the learning process is the richest resource of all.

When first introduced by Knowles (1970), andragogy had four core principles; learner's self-concept, learner's experience, readiness to learn and orientation to learning. Motivation to learn was added in 1984, Knowles (1984), and the need to know was added shortly after, Knowles (1986). Thus the core principles of andragogy today as offered by Knowles number six.

This inclusion of motivation to learn as a principle demonstrates the importance of motivation as a distinct theme within the overall adult-learning experience and more importantly highlights the distinction between how children are motivated and how adults are motivated. Yet are not all the principles cited motivating matters which drive the adult to access adult education? Andragogical approaches suggest that adults tend to be more motivated towards learning that helps them solve problems in their lives or results in internal rewards.

The final principle added to the core principles of andragogy, namely the need to know, is also worthy of comment, as the need to know affects motivation to learn, learning outcomes and post-training motivation to use learning. Andragogical principles by themselves are recognised as not being complete and andragogy has a series of weaknesses which have been extensively

critiqued, principally for the suggestions that adults are homogenous and their life trajectories can be distinctly identified in stages.

Davenport and Davenport (1985: 157) argue that andragogy is offered as a variety of theories in the realm of adult education, diluting any theoretical value. Hartree (1984: 205) claims there is no evidence to support Knowles' (1984) concept of andragogy as a theory or method at all. Pratt (1993: 21) believes andragogy has not achieved a theory status as it is not context-based. Merriam (2001: 11) criticises andragogy as having a blinding focus on the learner whilst ignoring the socio-historical context in which learning occurs.

Further criticisms acknowledged by Knowles *et al.* (2005) are that it has not been well tested empirically and that it is not clearly defined. Yet andragogy has contributed to our understanding of adult learners and what motivates them, accepting the scientifically convenient and simplistic stage-based approach. *The shoe that fits one person pinches another; there is no recipe for living that suits all cases.* Jung (1916: 41).

Research owes a debt to Knowles for his contribution to self-directed learning also. Knowles (1975: 18) describes self-directed learning as a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes.

Concluding comment on andragogy

Despite the many criticisms of andragogy, some of which originate from Knowles himself (Knowles *et al.* 2005), this researcher is not concerned with the status of andragogy but with the contribution this concept can add to the adult education debate. This researcher is of the opinion that the concept of andragogy has brought a consensus of thought to a significant number of adult education practitioners and fuelled the debate on adult education like no other concept over recent decades. For this reason alone the work of Knowles merits consideration. That consideration must be appropriate to the particular adult education landscape one is located in. VTOS is one such setting where the practical guidelines and considerations offered in andragogy can be located, accepting it is not offered as an ideal solution or exact guide.

Obstacles to access adult education

Obstacles are defined as *things that hinder progress or block one's way*, Oxford English Dictionary (2001). This is less restrictive a term than *barrier* which is defined as *an obstacle that prevents movement or access*, Oxford English Dictionary (2001). The term *barrier* does feature through the data collection phase of this inquiry as it was felt more appropriate to the target audience. This researcher is mindful of the claim, *ask a different question and you will get a different response*. Yet emphasis is placed on obstacles which on one hand have the potential to hinder access and on the other to block access, though this is not to the exclusion of the term *barrier*.

Ross (2005: 21) identifies barriers in Irish adult education such as; progression difficulties, a lack of appropriate learning ethos, a lack of knowledge of the learner and practical obstacles such as access to learning and supports for learners. King *et al.* (2002: 39) indicate five conceptual barriers; institutional, informational, situational, personal/dispositional and contextual. These are not new; situational, institutional and dispositional derive from the early work of Cross (1981).

Situational barriers refer to circumstances beyond one's control, such as a lack of time due to family responsibilities, costs and available resources. King *et al.* (2002: 40) highlight poverty as the predominant situational barrier in this regard. Lynch and O' Riordan (1998: 459) highlight the lack of space for adults to study. Owens (2000: 5) recognises these barriers as concerned with one's life situation, including resources.

According to Cross (1981: 98) institutional barriers consist of those organisational policies and practices that directly deter participation, for example, restrictive timetabling. Owens (2000: 5) identifies this conceptual barrier as encompassing image, ethos, administrative procedures and teaching practice. Appropriate teaching approaches, progression opportunities and facilitating wider access through alternative locations can reduce this barrier and many community education initiatives have evidenced the fact that greater participation in adult education results when more creative delivery strategies are employed, based on local and individual needs.

Dispositional barriers relate to self-perceptions about oneself as a learner, perhaps on the basis of age, social class, educational background, gender or achievements to date. Each of these themes emerged in the findings presented in Chapter Five, though to varying degrees. Burke (2006: 730) identifies one's aspirations and influences, noting that intricate operations of power, privilege and inequality are rarely addressed. Feelings such as mistrust, suspicion, cynicism and fear are often prevalent in all adult learners considering returning to formal education.

It is the view of this researcher that learning fuels more learning and breaks from learning can have negative longer-term effects, as learners feel good about themselves when they are learning. Many learning resources are designed for traditional learners, where adult education serves the needs of what is seen as the non-traditional learner. O' Brien and Ó Fathaigh (2007: 3) define non-traditional learners as *those who are either of mature age and/or have a disability and/or are socio-economically disadvantaged in some way*.

Informational barriers refer to the need to be aware of educational opportunities and entitlements and the quality and reliability of that information. The exclusive language used in adult education provision runs contrary to the inclusive aims of second chance education. Potential students are bombarded with VTOS, FETAC, NFQ, BTEI, BTEA, PLC and FÁS to name but a few. O' Brien and Ó Fathaigh (2007: 58) cite the need to be up to date with the latest opportunities to address this barrier, yet more is required around the language used to communicate with potential students.

Finally, contextual barriers lean towards the influence of cultural roles in learning decisions, for example, the pressure on men to earn rather than learn as identified by, Lynch and O' Riordan (1998: 457), the WRC Report (1999: 26), and as evidenced in this inquiry.

An overview of the literature reveals further obstacles of note. McGivney (2004) identifies a number of significant and complex obstacles for non-traditional learners, including; contradictory policies inhibiting progress towards widening participation, the need to challenge assumptions, attitudes, perceptions and expectations of social class and gender roles, the length of initial schooling, prior educational experiences, a lack of focus on the personal value of education, widening participation is politically about employability, practical barriers such as affordability, course length, pre-course information, managing study time and location and finally, a lack of support.

O' Brien and Ó Fathaigh (2007: 59) identify three important factors in addressing obstacles to adult participation: 1. Structures - EU, national, regional and local; 2. Culture – groupings and characteristics; and 3. Individual dynamics – self-related issues. Perhaps the biggest barrier for all adult groups is actually seeing themselves in the role of student.

Tough (1979) discovered that adults are motivated to develop their potential but that this motivation is frequently blocked by such barriers as negative self-concept as a student, inaccessibility of opportunities, time constraints and programmes that violate principles of adult-learning. Maslow (1972: 43)

speaks of the crippling effect of fear which can erode one's motivation to access learning. Hilgard and Bower (1966) discuss anxiety levels and the beneficial or detrimental effects of certain kinds of encouragements to learn.

Fear as an obstacle to accessing adult education emerged strongly, particularly through the qualitative research undertaken in this research and whilst it is widely recognised as an obstacle, the scale of that obstacle may be underestimated. Lynch (2009: 9) highlights the fear of returning to education, or of failing, for adults and raises human rights questions regarding the State's Primary education system which requires children by law to attend and participate in compulsory education. Owens (2000: 23) posits that the greatest barrier to participation in education may be located deep within the self.

Concluding comment on obstacles to access adult education

As evidenced in Chapter Six obstacles emerged as a significant theme. In fact the success in addressing the theme of motivation could not have been realised without facilitating the vast array of data collected in relation to obstacles. The separation of this theme into five conceptual barriers proved most helpful in collecting, recording and analysing these data. Many of the recommendations contained in Chapter Seven emerged through the addressing of this theme.

The Irish context

Without doubt the single most important document in Irish adult education for many years was the Government's Policy Paper, the White Paper on Adult Education, *Learning for Life*, DES (2000). This Government publication set out a blueprint for future development and expansion of adult education in Ireland. This publication was significant in putting adult education on the map. It facilitated greater access and recognised that learning should be provided over a lifespan rather than up to the late teens. It sought to end the notion of terminal exams and to foster the notion of lifelong and life-wide learning.

This publication prioritised basic education and adopted a more philosophical base than previous Government publications. As well as literacy, community education was recognised as playing an important part in lifelong learning and Community Education Facilitators were appointed throughout the country. The core principles advocated by this publication were positive; equality, interculturalism, a systemic approach, citizenship, cohesion, competitiveness and community building.

The DES (2000) White Paper on Adult Education does have its limitations and flaws. Some very necessary structures which were due to be established in order to ensure improvements in the area of lifelong learning have yet to materialise a decade later, the National Adult Learning Council and the Local

Adult Learning Boards being the most obvious. Unfortunate too is the focus on the most disadvantaged, which of course is good, yet it has created a new disadvantaged in the form of low waged workers, many of whom do not have even upper Second-level education. In trying to broaden the categories of people who are eligible for free adult education low-waged people became excluded inadvertently, as well as many adults working in the home. All should have the right to education, at least to upper Second-level. As mentioned previously, the White Paper aspires to a continuum of education from the cradle to the grave, but what is presented effectively amounts to a policy for lifelong learning, an impossible task.

As a State paper, the close connection between the State and the economy is of concern to those who see adult education having an important *raison d'être* over and above supporting economic development. Issues such as justice, care, community, volunteerism, democracy, social-inclusion and social considerations must not be allowed to be diluted. It was widely recognised that the Irish adult education sector had received inadequate attention in the past and this publication was welcomed by all, particularly because the awareness and debate stretched across many areas and types of learning. This emphasis on adult education and lifelong learning evolved almost as quickly as Ireland's rise in the new global order.

A multitude of social changes helped develop adult education policy at the turn of the millennium, in particular a changed labour workforce was needed to satisfy unprecedented economic growth, which was made up of returned

migrants, non-Irish nationals and increased engagement by women, all demanding training and skills. Basic literacy skills particularly were highlighted by the Literacy Survey, Morgan *et al.* (1997), revealing then that one quarter of the adult population in Ireland was functionally illiterate. Ireland experienced a swift shift to a multicultural society, coupled with the decline of the Catholic Church.

Ireland's census 2006 revealed that there were non-Irish nationals living in every town in Ireland. Demographic changes focused educational policy on social-inclusion, particularly targeting those groups eligible for VTOS, but by default creating a new disadvantaged group in the form of low-income earners. Finally our role in the EU shaped legislative and funding arrangements as well as attitudes on education. All of these social changes created new pressures on education provision.

Despite an awareness of the difficulties associated with educational disadvantage, social classification remains prevalent today. To illustrate the point, as already stated, one quarter of the population is functionally illiterate. Conway (2002: 61) points out that educational underachievement and early school leaving is widespread in disadvantaged areas with social class impinging on all levels of education, thus increasing or decreasing the opportunities for further educational advancement. Education and poverty are directly related, as the majority of families in poverty are headed by an adult who has no educational qualification.

Watson *et al.* (2006), in their review of the Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) programme in Ireland, which has many commonalities with VTOS, offers an interesting insight into current issues. In 2006, there were approximately thirty thousand participants in the PLC sector, twice the number of participants as in 1991. Despite considerable expansion of the PLC sector, female over-representation has remained virtually constant over time. This gender imbalance reflects greater male progression into alternative further education training options, particularly the apprenticeship route, as evidenced by the DES (2007) *Gender in Irish Learning* study.

Important from a VTOS perspective is the trend in PLC participation by age groups. PLC was set up initially for school leavers (17 to 19 year olds). Since the late 1990s younger participants have remained relatively constant at fifteen thousand participants and the more mature learners (over 21) have increased from very small numbers to over fifteen thousand participants in 2006. Thus the doubling of numbers referred to earlier can be accounted for by the growth in adult learners participating in PLC courses.

Watson *et al.* (2006: 33) highlight the emerging role of the PLC sector in providing a route to second chance education and lifelong learning. These findings have important parallels on issues relating to accessing VTOS, particularly as VTOS is often perceived as competing with PLC, given that both programmes concentrate on offering FETAC accredited programmes.

Concluding comment on the Irish context

Providing for adult education and lifelong learning in an age of austerity is becoming an increasing challenge. Rationalisations and mergers at Third-level are already underway. The broad sweep of schemes in the further education and training arena, in which VTOS is located, cannot be sustained in their current form at a time of mass Government borrowings and significant budget deficits. Greater integration between providers at national and local level forms one of the recommendation contained in Chapter Seven.

The European context

A *EURYDICE* EU survey prepared for the Lisbon summit in 2000 sought to assess each member State's contribution to an education and training initiative which would occur throughout life stages. Given that the European Commission declared 1996 the *European Year of Lifelong Learning*, the report concluded that lifelong learning is here and evident in national policies. What was not evident however was how the concept should be implemented. The following documents sought to further clarify and integrate European activities in this area:

- A Memorandum on Lifelong Learning, CEC (2000), *Commission Working Paper*.
- Making a European area for Lifelong Learning a Reality, CEC (2001), *Commission Communication*.

- Quality Indicators of Lifelong Learning, CEC (2002a), *Commission Report*.
- Lifelong Learning, CEC (2002b), *Council Resolution*.
- Integrated action programme for Lifelong Learning, CEC (2004), *European Council and Parliament*.
- Key competencies for Lifelong Learning, CEC (2005), *European Council and Parliament*.
- Delivering lifelong learning for knowledge, creativity and innovation, CEU (2008), Draft. *European Council and Commission*.
- The EQF (2008) European Qualifications Framework, *Office for Official Publications of the European Communities*.
- An updated strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training, CEC (2008). *Commission Communication*.

The Lisbon, Barcelona, Bologna and Copenhagen summits led to four European integration projects aiding progress to targets set in an ambitious plan entitled *Education and Training 2010*. Some of the tangible outcomes from this ongoing process include the following European Projects: Comenius, Erasmus, Leonardo da Vinci and Grundtvig. The achievement of the European Qualifications Framework in 2008 was also a significant event.

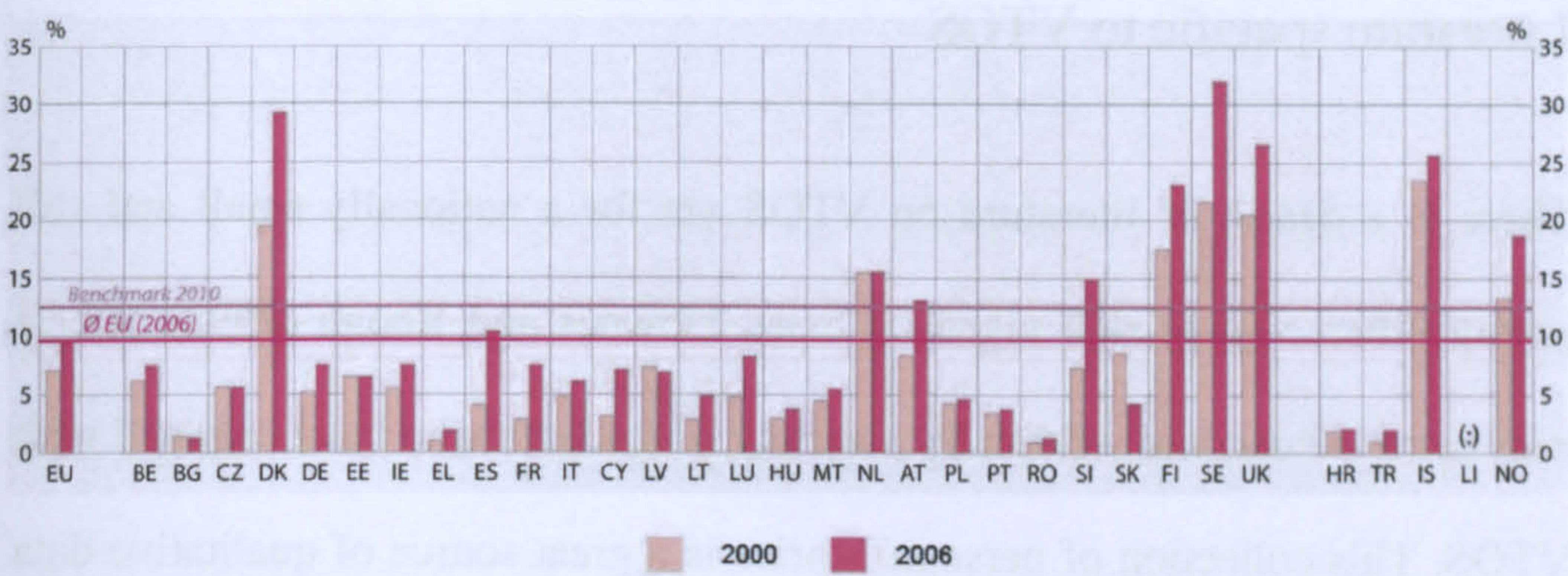
One of the more recent and relevant proposals from Europe supported by both the European Parliament and European Council was the policy paper *Key competencies for Lifelong Learning*, CEC (2005). This proposal develops the themes first formulated in the Memorandum on Lifelong Learning (2000)

from what has become known as the Lisbon Agenda and what was then set out in the strategic roadmap *Education and Training Plan 2010*. This important framework offers a European reference from which each member State can seek to measure and improve key competencies in eight distinct areas for lifelong learning.

The European Council CEU (2008) joint progress report highlighted that progress had been made towards realising ambitious targets set for 2010. However it states that progress remains insufficient in many areas including the implementation of lifelong learning strategies. The targets for participation in lifelong learning will also be missed, as evidenced in Diagram 2.4 (p.83).

However according to Brine (2006: 663), *all European discourse offers lifelong learning as inherent goodness, but beneath the pleasantries lies a discourse of competition, of inclusion and exclusion, and of stratification that continues to (re)construct educational and labour-market power relations based on gender, class and race, disability, age and status quo*. Borg and Mayo (2005: 218) support this criticism claiming the emergent neo-liberal globalisation agenda orchestrated by capitalism's dynamism has distorted the once humanistic concept of lifelong education beyond recognition.

Percentage of European population aged 25-64 participating in education and training in the four weeks prior to the survey, 2000-2006.



Note: IE = Ireland Source: CEU (2008), Council of the European Union.

Diagram 2.4 European lifelong learning participation 2000 - 2006

Concluding comment on the European context

On the global stage, Europe has sought to create a more united continent and is succeeding, but too slowly to become the significant global player it could be. Europe is united in developing a common education and vocational training policy as set out in Articles 149 and 150 of the Maastricht Treaty (1992), though as stated has not succeeded in reaching its own targets. The European position is increasingly focused on global capitalist dictates, which is concerning. On a more positive note there is also a focus on European citizenship through programmes such as Comenius and Grundtvig, mentioned previously.

Literature specific to VTOS

There is a dearth of literature on VTOS yet for a nationally small and still young scheme some rich vignettes exist. Downes and Keogh (1998) offer a rich narrative account written by a variety of students who have engaged with VTOS. This collection of personal stories is a great source of qualitative data on the possibilities within VTOS. It is a positive account of what can be achieved and is evidence of the need for VTOS-type programmes throughout the country. Keogh (1993) in a paper entitled *Towards Some Shared Meanings* presents a comprehensive account of the VTOS landscape drawing from theories and then emerging practice. Local perspectives on VTOS are presented by Sheridan (2006) and Higgins (2006) and a broader VTOS perspective is found in Duggan *et al.*'s (1994) *Evaluation of the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme* and Ronayne's (2000) Conference Paper *Reaching The Excluded*.

Concluding comment on literature specific to VTOS

For what is still a pilot scheme entering its twenty-first year, VTOS has seen the unprecedented economic highs and sharp economic fall of recent times and still serves the adults for which it was established. The economic cycle has gone full circle over the last two decades. The challenge going forward is what role will the now well established VTOS fulfil at a time of record unemployment and Government finances so scarce?

Social and Economic agenda

Curtis (2004: 7) in an editorial comment questions whether we can sustain a learning-for-life, as well as a learning-for-work agenda given the economic imperative and demands particularly in relation to the *knowledge economy* drive? Fleming (2004: 12) asked *whether VTOS (in a country with historically low levels of unemployment) will continue to find a place in the new developments or will it be left to wither on the vine so to speak?*

Field (2006: 2) speaks of the political economy of adult-learning in Britain and speaks of his long-standing concerns with the political interest in adult education, particularly the narrow agenda of a more productive and efficient workforce.

Despite broad idealistic Government rhetoric, there is a narrow agenda concerned with the development of a more productive and efficient workforce to raise the nation's economic competitiveness. Field (2006: 46) informs us that there has been a silent explosion in lifelong learning driven by more than economic forces, such as cultural and social drivers shaping adult education provision. The economic agenda is a legitimate force yet the debate should concentrate on the balance between the economic and social imperatives, as Keogh (2003: 2) highlighted the widening gap between high income earners and the socially excluded. In 2009 it is found in the guise of the *smart economy*, Government of Ireland, (2008). All across Europe and the developed world there is a race to create knowledge advancement to attract

global finance and greater economic activity. All these strategies or concepts serve to underlie continuous learning as a key characteristic of modernity and the knowledge race. Where do those who lack skills (*both within and outside the workforce*) feature in that race? The National Competitiveness Council (NCC, 2009: 3) highlights education as being central to Ireland's economic and social progress.

Field (2006) and Jarvis (2007) speak of the social inequalities and greater divides in modernity and the consequences to developed societies and economies for such a situation. Jarvis (2007: 63) claims that adult education and lifelong learning only gained mainstream status because of global changes, work practice evolution and the needs of advanced capitalism.

The pace of global change and mobility demands continuous learning. In 2009 nineteen hundred computer manufacturing workers lost their employment in the south west of Ireland from a plant which was highly profitable. Those jobs were relocated to a cheaper cost base in Eastern Europe where the skills base had risen to a sufficient level to attract a global computer company. The constant Government response across the developed world is up-skilling and value-added employment reflecting the changes that advanced capitalism demands.

Lost in this economic focus are those in society who have relatively low levels of skills and those who are already outside the workforce, the very people for whom VTOS was established. Field (2006: 115) identifies social exclusion as

a cumulative process, with the knowledge focus of modernity complicating the matter. This dichotomy of economy and society is a constant, both theoretically and practically, and should remain an ongoing consideration for VTOS.

Concluding comment on Social and Economic agenda

VTOS was established as a labour-market intervention at a time of high unemployment and that original *raison d'être* some twenty years later remains most relevant. Yet during the life of VTOS more than the economic agenda was satisfied. VTOS played an important role as a social-inclusion measure, one which often went undocumented, yet the value of this social measure is worthy of investigation. The current reality is that the economic conditions post *celtic tiger* are likely to reduce the opportunities for those seeking access to a social-inclusion learning opportunity.

Chapter Three

Research methodology

Methodology refers to the theory of accumulating knowledge and to the best methods to be employed in acquiring that knowledge. Methodology according to Opie (2004: 16) refers to *the theory of getting knowledge and the consideration of the best ways, methods, or procedures, by which data is obtained*. The EdD Programme Guide, Open University (2005: 37) presents educational research as *a complex and sophisticated process*.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework presented in Table 3.1 of this thesis remained amorphous during the early stages of this research process. What emerged was a pragmatic philosophical underpinning or conceptual framework to a mixed methods sequential explanatory strategy, as advocated by Creswell (2003: 16).

Table 3.1 Conceptual framework				
Research question	Methodology	Strategy	Methods	Analysis
What motivates adults to access VTOS?	Mixed methods	Sequential Explanatory	Survey Workshop Focus group	Thematic Mixed
Pragmatic philosophical underpinning				

Philosophical assumptions, a pragmatic approach

Practitioners trust knowing through experience. From the outset this researcher sought to articulate personal assumptions about what the learning process and learning outcome of this research might be. These knowledge claims presented under the umbrella title of philosophical assumptions, do include epistemological considerations as to how we know knowledge and ontological considerations as to what knowledge is.

A fundamental assumption on the part of this researcher is that the research question is the most important consideration in the overall research process. Remaining true to the research question proved more important than remaining true to the original research design, resulting in a movement through methodologies during the early stages of this research process.

Philosophically, pragmatism is an approach that evaluates theories or beliefs in terms of the success of their practical application. Founded as a concept by Charles Sanders Peirce and established as a philosophical movement by the contributions of fellow American philosophers of the time, most notably John Dewey, pragmatism emerged out of a rejection of certain traditional assumptions about the nature of knowledge and research inquiry. Whilst accepting that pragmatists take many forms, there is broad agreement on the following characteristics as outlined by Creswell (2003: 11): that knowledge claims arise out of actions, situations and consequences; that there is a

concern with multiple applications and solutions; and that researchers use all approaches to understand the problem.

A Mixed Methods approach

A mixed methods study involves the collection or analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study in which the data is collected concurrently or sequentially, is given a priority, and involves the integration of that data at one or more stages in the process of the research. Greene *et al.* (1989: 255) identify five purposes for a mixed methods approach and each component will be explored towards locating this research strategy within the overall conceptual framework.

More specifically this research design adopted a sequential explanatory design as offered by Creswell (2003: 215), which is outlined in Diagram 3.1.

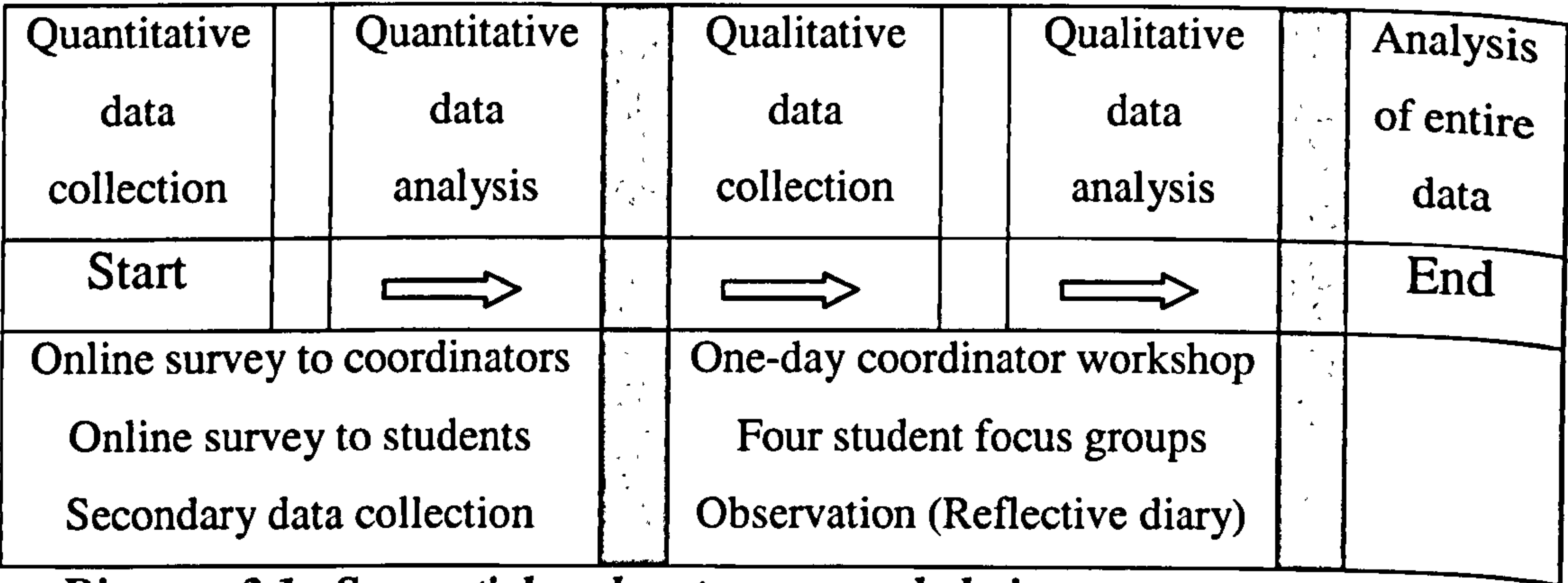


Diagram 3.1 Sequential explanatory research design

To illustrate this mixed methods approach further, let us briefly consider the research approaches that mixed methods seeks to mix, namely quantitative and qualitative approaches to research.

Interestingly the Oxford English Dictionary (2001) defines quantitative as *of, concerned with, or measured by quantity, often contrasted with qualitative*. So immediately we are drawn into the opposing terminology of qualitative. Quantitative research is at one ideal end of a continuum, along which actual research can take place, with qualitative at the other. Qualitative is concerned with, or measured by, quality. Both quantitative and qualitative research have many types, influenced by different disciplines and different theoretical approaches which can take many forms and types as highlighted by Atkinson *et al.* (1993: 17).

The distinction in research approach is largely grounded in two contrasting approaches to explanation. Mohr (1982: 42) termed this contrast *variance theory* and *process theory*. The quantitative variance theory approach statistically measures differences in variables, whereas the qualitative process theory approach applies to events and the processes which connect them. This quantitative - qualitative tension is at the heart of the chosen methodology.

Mixed methods can be described simply as a methodology which utilises a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches to educational research. Thus a mixed methods study would contain a quantitative and qualitative sub-study. On this much there is broad agreement, but alas over the

past three decades since its emergence as an alternative approach to the traditional and well-established quantitative or qualitative approaches, there has been much disagreement and inconsistency as to how the two sub-studies relate to each other.

This disagreement has not been a bad thing, as a variety of viewpoints have shaped thinking over the years, adding to the reputation of this emerging approach. Perspectives (Creswell and Tashakkori, 2007), purposes (Greene *et al.*, 1989) and distinct characteristics (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003) have all emerged from the debate and discourse on mixed methods. This debate has assisted researchers intending to utilise such an approach, encouraging them to adopt a mixed methods approach most fitting with their particular study.

Greene (2005: 208) states that a mixed methods strategy is rooted in a democratic and defensible set of values; those of acceptance, tolerance and understanding of difference. It resists the battle over method, as that battle has raged before and considers whether it should even be the core battle. This researcher would posit that research is about developing a better understanding of educational phenomena, towards the goal of better educational practice.

In better understanding a mixed methods approach, consideration must be given to the nature and role of inquiry paradigms. Paradigms are social constructions, historically and culturally embedded discourse practices made up of a coherent set of assumptions and stances, but not intrinsically bound to

a particular set of methods or techniques. Is there one best paradigm or should one be sought? Is it not possible to accept multiple diverse perspectives? This important issue is further considered later in this chapter.

Today's knowledge society and knowledge economy demands a commitment to embracing diversity. The interface between philosophy and methodology in mixed methods practice needs addressing. What do we do with our philosophical stances and assumptions when we employ a mixed methods strategy? The conceptual levels of epistemology and philosophy need to be matched with the method or practice chosen. The question of mixing paradigms cannot be avoided, but what is leading our research design, the question or the method?

Mixed methods research has come of age, the discourse has moved on from the quantitative – qualitative debate, to the acceptance that the two traditions can be complimentary. The debate now is as to the level of integration. Using both a quantitative and qualitative approach requires grounding in theory that can on the one hand guide the design and implementation of a mixed methods approach, and on the other hand defend the research design. The mixed methods landscape is still quite bare. Greene *et al.* (1989) sought to charter some of the landscape in their review of fifty-seven empirical mixed methods evaluations conducted through the 1980s. This review uncovered five purposes for mixed methods evaluation; triangulation, complementarity, development, initiation and expansion, each of which will now be explored further.

Triangulation

Mixed methods research was born out of triangulating data sources, primarily as a means of bringing together the then *polar opposite* quantitative and qualitative traditions. It was accepted by some researchers that all research methods have limitations and that biases inherent in any one method could be cancelled by biases in another. From its classic source, triangulation may be defined as *the designed use of multiple methods, with offsetting biases, in investigations of the same phenomenon in order to strengthen the validity of findings*. Triangulation seeks convergence and correspondence of results across different method types. Where variance occurs, it demands further exploration.

Greene *et al.* (1989: 266) claim that practically triangulation requires that multiple methods be intentionally employed to assess the same phenomenon, be simultaneously implemented and finally to preserve their counteracting biases, be implemented independently. This approach, whilst valuable, is too restrictive in its purpose of convergence for this researcher's purpose. However, from this concept emerged further reasons for mixing different approaches which can be summed up as using one method to illuminate the findings of another.

Complementarity

A complementarity mixed methods approach uses quantitative and qualitative methods to measure overlapping yet different facets of a phenomenon, resulting in a greater understanding of the phenomenon. This differs from

triangulation's purpose of seeking convergence, as convergence requires an assessment of the same conceptual phenomenon. Furthermore, according to Mark and Shotland (1987: 95), complementarity uses different methods to assess different levels of a phenomenon, similar to peeling the layers off an onion. This complementarity purpose is embraced by this researcher who is seeking to use qualitative means to increase the interpretability and meaningfulness of the empirical findings of a primarily quantitative study.

This researcher employed a sequential mixed methods research design where initially a review of the literature informed the quantitative strand in the form of two online surveys, which further informed the qualitative strand in the form of a workshop and focus group sessions. In utilising the typology of purpose of Greene *et al.* (1989: 259) for mixing quantitative and qualitative research methods, one could claim that this researcher is guided by a complementarity intent.

Development

Development purposes are characterised by the sequential use of quantitative and qualitative methods, where according to Greene *et al.* (1989: 260), the first method is used to help inform the development of the second. This purpose is very much in keeping with this researcher's aspirations in terms of the overall aims of this inquiry's methodological approach. Development is reflected in the sequential timing of the two methods and the intended strategy of using the quantitative findings to better inform the development of the qualitative element.

Initiation

This purpose refers to the often unintended but none-the-less possible discovery of paradox and fresh perspectives which emerge, rather than constitute a planned intent. Particularly in complex studies, discrepancies can be intentionally analysed by means of contradiction and paradox. Initiation seeks to use areas of non-convergence in order to suggest areas for further analysis or recast the research question. Given the longitudinal nature of this researcher's study, it could be said that this research process is influenced by the initiation intent, in that the quantitative findings will shape the application of qualitative approaches. Whilst the discovery of contradiction or non-convergence was not an aim of this researcher's study, it did emerge through data analysis in a limited manner and will be elaborated on in Chapter Six.

Expansion

This purpose can best be described as a multi-task method that aims for scope and breadth through the use of multiple components to investigate different phenomena. It is often used in studies where one methodological approach assesses processes and the alternative approach assesses outcomes.

There are many perspectives on mixed methods. Creswell and Tashakkori (2007: 303) identify four different but not necessarily mutually exclusive perspectives. Of interest to this researcher is the practice perspective where strategies emerge during the research process encouraging new methodological ideas to enhance existing methodologies. Philosophically this is in keeping with pragmatism. Greene (2005: 209) highlights the practical

value of a mixed methods strategy using multiple and diverse methods for gathering, analysing and representing educational phenomena within a framework that intentionally engages with different ways of knowing and valuing that which the different methods embody.

A history of mixed methods

The evolution of mixed methods research according to Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003: 5) can be divided into the following periods; the traditional 1900 to 1950 period saw mixed methods research being conducted with little controversy. The period 1950 to 1970 witnessed the demise of positivism and the emergence of multi-method or mixed research designs, though by this time the field of mixed methods research had not emerged. 1970 to 1990 was marked by the ascendance of constructivism and the paradigm wars. Qualitative methods were in vogue and the incompatibility thesis, (*that compatibility between the two main research traditions is impossible given the incompatibility of the paradigm underlying the traditions*), led to the paradigm wars. During this time mixed methods studies emerged, as documented by Greene *et al.* (1989), as did the concept of triangulation, introduced by Denzin (1978), with its many types which brought further validity to mixed approaches.

1990 to the present saw the emergence of pragmatism and the compatibility thesis. A pragmatist position emerged as an alternative to the incompatibility position and many more mixed research studies emerged, which fuelled the

discourse around mixed methods research. Philosophically, pragmatism was offered by Howe (1988: 10) to counter the incompatibility thesis which was predicated on the link between epistemology and method. A major tenet of Howe's (1988: 15) concept of pragmatism was that quantitative and qualitative methods are compatible, thus researchers could utilise both traditions. This position has been widely challenged.

Mixed methods research can be simply defined as *lines of inquiry that integrate both quantitative and qualitative techniques for data collection and analysis*. The manner and scope of that integration should be a mix appropriate to the research question or topic. Applying both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods to exploring a research question improves the opportunity for greater benefits. Rossman and Wilson (1985: 627) describe broadly three reasons for such a mixed approach:

- To enable confirmation or corroboration of each other via triangulation.
- To elaborate analysis, providing richer detail.
- To initiate new lines of thinking by considering paradoxes, thus providing fresh insight.

Further benefits of mixed methods research include:

- The investigative qualities of both quantitative (*theory verification*) and qualitative (*theory generation*) techniques can be applied to better address research questions.

- Mixed methods provides stronger inferences, as more inferences emerge which can confirm, compliment or challenge each other.
- Mixed methods may offer greater diversity of viewpoints.

Mixed methods research cannot yet claim a maturity. According to Teddlie and Tashakkori (2003: 3), one of the perceived weaknesses of mixed methods as a field of research is the controversies highlighted by scholars in the field notably Maxwell and Loomis (2003) and Creswell (2003). Disagreements emerged around basic definitions, paradigmatic foundations and design issues, for example. However, whilst these controversies are further challenging those involved in this field of research, it is this researcher's view that the research question should drive the research methodology and thus render the debate on mixing methodology to a secondary position. Mixed methods was chosen, as in the opinion of this researcher it provides better opportunities to answer the research questions, to provide stronger inferences and to present more divergent views. Different inferences often reflect different voices and perspectives and such variety is welcome.

The paradigmatic foundation for mixed methods research is pragmatism as advocated by Datta (1997: 44). Pragmatism was chosen as, in the opinion of this researcher it:

- supports the use of both quantitative and qualitative research methods;
- places the research question at the core of the considerations;
- embraces many points of view, not an either/or position;

- avoids metaphysical concepts, for example truth, and thus reduces debate;
- presents a very practical and applied research philosophy.

Mixed methods is conducive to a varied theory (*thinking and knowing*) and practice (*acting and doing*) relationship. Thus attention is now focused on the paradigmatic stances for and against a mixed methods approach. These stances can be broadly categorised as follows; purist, complementary strengths, dialectic, alternative, a-paradigmatic and substantive theory. Each of these stances will be briefly discussed.

By paradigm, this researcher is specifically referring to post-positivism or constructivism rather than the technique or method terms of quantitative or qualitative. In exploring the nature and scope of paradigms it is worth noting that much attention is given to the alternative paradigms and sub-paradigms within, yet little attention is paid to the question, what is the nature of a philosophical paradigm for social inquiry?

Greene (2007: 51) highlights this question, though according to Bliss (2008) does not sufficiently address it. In the opinion of Bliss (2008: 191), Handa (1986) addresses the question through offering a social science paradigm or worldview, where paradigms are more than simply philosophy, they incorporate one's practical views, one's experiences and one's perception of reality. This point further justifies the inclusion of this researcher's positionality statement in the researcher biography at the outset of this thesis.

Paradigmatic stances on mixed methods

Purist stance

Purists such as Lincoln and Guba (1985) believe it is not possible to mix paradigms in studies carried out by the same person because the assumptions of distinct and traditional paradigms, each with their coherent completeness, are fundamentally incompatible. Paradigms are perceived as integrally interconnected philosophical assumptions, ontologically, epistemologically and methodologically and different paradigms are simply incompatible.

Complementary strengths stance

Theorists such as Morse (2003) maintain that methods implemented within different paradigms should be kept separate as the assumptions of distinct and traditional paradigms are importantly different, though not fundamentally incompatible. Differences are respected and kept separate so as to maintain methodological integrity.

Dialectic stance

Engaging dialogically with paradigm differences can yield new insights as paradigms are social constructions and so are not sacred. Here paradigms are presented as historic social constructions which guide and direct practical inquiry, along with context and theory.

Alternative stance

Philosophical incommensurables among paradigms are reconcilable through new emergent paradigms such as pragmatism. The view is that traditional inquiry paradigms are no longer relevant to practice and new paradigms are required, a view shared by Teddlie and Tashakkori (2003).

A-paradigmatic stance

Theorists such as Patton (2002), claim that because the assumptions of distinct paradigms are logically independent, they can be matched in various combinations to satisfy the practical demands of an inquiry. Inquiry decisions are guided by the practical characteristics and demands of the research question, not by the philosophical paradigm chosen.

Substantive theory stance

The assumptions of traditional or emergent paradigms may be embedded or intertwined with substantive theories, where paradigms assist but do not by themselves guide practice. The main concerns are the substantive issues and conceptual theories relevant to the research question and process.

Current thinking on the nature of a mixed methods strategy

According to Tashakkori and Creswell (2008: 3) mixed methods has developed in a bottom-up manner from the pragmatic needs of researchers and evaluators in various fields. Furthermore, there have been two broad drivers of

mixed methodological approaches; the first are those who seek to use all possible methods to answer research questions and the second are those who feel it necessary to examine social phenomena in a more eclectic manner, utilising multiple perspectives. The quantitative – qualitative debate has advanced, as evidenced in current writings particularly since 2007 in the *Journal of Mixed Methods Research* (Sage Publications), where the debate has moved onto what is being mixed? This recognition has paved the way for conceptualising mixed methods on a continuum that includes dimensions or aspects of both research traditions, a point further evidenced by the paradigmatic stances outlined.

Chapter Four Research methods

Methods can be defined as *a particular set of procedures or instruments for accomplishing or approaching something*. For this research process, methods refer to the specific research techniques or instruments used to derive the data sought and to analyse that data to answer or elaborate on the research question posited. The word originates from the Greek *methodos* meaning pursuit of knowledge, which aptly describes the objective of this research process. In this researcher’s view a method is only appropriate if it achieves its purpose.

Presented in italics in Diagram 4.1, the following research instruments were employed to fulfil the research strategy, namely mixed methods, considered in Chapter Three:

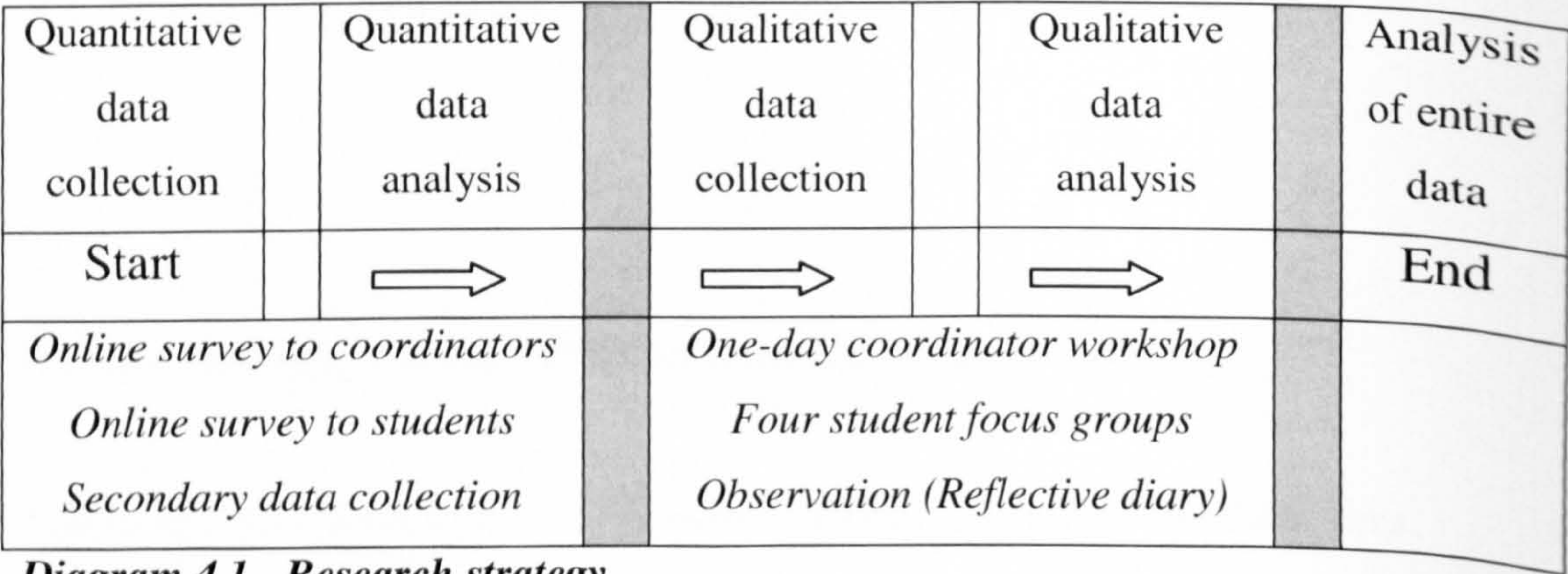


Diagram 4.1 Research strategy

Online VTOS coordinator survey

This initial quantitative online survey sought to uncover the opinions and facts from the gatekeepers to the VTOS programme. The significant and overwhelming response of over ninety percent of the approximately one hundred coordinators nationally, proved an encouraging start to this research inquiry. Choosing local VTOS coordinators for the initial study in this research process was important for this researcher, as these people are the gatekeepers to the case study selected and they offer a different and unique perspective on the issues faced by adult learners seeking to engage in a VTOS programme of formal learning.

Given VTOS coordinators' working schedule, an e-mail survey invitation contained in Appendix One was distributed in October 2006 with a link to the online survey, (*presented in word format in Appendix Two*). Coordinators were then given a two week opportunity to respond, this was a contributing factor to the high response rate. Responses can be divided into three equal groups; the first third responded within a few days and without prompting, the second third responded once prompted and the final third responded after being prompted more than once. The survey was available online for almost three weeks. The survey had been piloted on three VTOS colleagues and minor modifications were made to the survey, particularly in terms of question order and the manner in which questions were asked. This piloting, which is strongly advocated by Youngman (1994: 262), was a valuable exercise in

ensuring the respondents understood what was being asked of them. Coordinators participated entirely online and each survey link was unique, allowing this researcher to monitor the process effectively. An online survey was chosen as it allowed for specific quantitative data to be collected relatively quickly. It was easier to administer, objective, impersonal and time-efficient, an excellent tool given the constraints of time and resources for this research project. The structures of the questions were influenced by the contributions of Youngman (1994), Bell (1994) and Creswell (2003).

This technique proved valuable in painting a picture of the VTOS landscape which was a welcome yet unexpected bonus given the high response rate. Conceptually it served to create a profile of the coordinators and the type of learning centres they operate in. The results also uncovered the size and type of learning provision taking place in these centres. More specifically to this research inquiry, the coordinators' survey uncovered their views as to the motivating factors and obstacles encountered by their adult learners.

The Further Education Section of the Department of Education and Science (DES) provided this researcher with the e-mail details for all coordinators which proved most helpful. There was always the option to inform coordinators by post where the contact details would be much more reliable, as many of the e-mail details available were obsolete. This option was rejected as the survey was an online survey and could only be accessed through an Internet-enabled computer.

The survey was sent to ninety-four coordinators on the 10th of October 2006, a further fifty-eight invitations had to be sent over the following two weeks. Four were sent to new coordinators, twenty-six were sent to new e-mail addresses for existing coordinators and the remaining twenty-eight were re-sent to existing e-mail addresses where the original message was accidentally deleted.

This raised the question, should notice by post have been sent in advance to ensure that the e-mail invitation to participate in the survey was not treated as junk mail? This reality resulted in subsequent online research activity being communicated by post and by e-mail. Of the one hundred and two coordinators identified from the details released from the Further Education Section of the DES, ninety-two responses were received. These responses were received from each of the thirty-three VEC regions in Ireland, reflecting the national coverage of the survey. Of the remaining ten coordinators who did not participate in the survey, four said they would complete the survey but in the end stated they were too busy, four coordinators had no Internet or e-mail access during the time of this survey and two coordinators were absent from work during the survey and there were no replacements available.

The survey process was challenging, particularly in the third and final week. Using e-mail as the medium to deliver the survey had the advantage of almost instantly identifying the inactive e-mail address as the undelivered e-mails bounced back. Almost one third of the original contact details received were inactive. Through follow up phone conversations updated e-mail details were

obtained. The online statistical package *questionpro.com* was particularly useful in being able to identify which coordinators completed the survey. Overall, the average completion time was eleven minutes and by clicking a button it was sent off with no postage or paper trail. By the end of the first week, thirty-six responses were received and an e-mail of thanks was sent to each participant. By the end of the second week the response rate was up to seventy and again an e-mail of thanks was sent to those who completed it. This doubling of response would not have been achieved if not for the telephone follow-up which proved most time consuming.

No e-mail reminders were sent at any stage as it was felt more effective to telephone coordinators to answer any queries or address any concerns. The final week was an uncomfortable experience as this researcher was keen to use all efforts and energy to get as close to a full response as possible, not for the purpose of getting a better analysis as the response rate was more than satisfactory for that purpose, but for two other reasons.

The primary reason was to encourage a shift in mindset around professional reflective practice and demonstrate that it is possible to engage a significant number of professionals to examine their practice, even in light of the many and increasing demands made on them, and this was the first time that such a survey had taken place nationally. Secondly there was the ethical issue of anonymity. In the final few days it became clear that every region in Ireland was represented in the survey except for two.

It transpired that the first region had no VTOS coordinator, as all its VTOS students were dispersed mode students but an administrator with responsibility for VTOS did complete the survey. In the second instance the coordinator of the region wished to participate but was stalling. Thankfully a response was received in time and the survey could then claim to be completely nationally representative. By the closing day of the survey, the response rate had reached ninety-two participants, or ninety percent of all coordinators.

This high response rate was also realised due to the visible support of certain key individuals and associations as well as this researcher's employer. Important supporters of the research included the National Coordinator of VTOS, Helen Keogh, the Chair of the National Association of VTOS Coordinators, at that time, Carmel Sheridan, as well as this researcher's CEO David Leahy from the Tipperary North Riding VEC. The overall summary survey results can be found in Appendix Three.

This initial study in the shape of an online survey to coordinators proved beneficial for a number of reasons: practically it allowed this researcher gain greater competence in the particular statistical online package utilised; the initial focus on the gatekeepers afforded an opportunity to speak to many VTOS coordinators from all over the country and gauge support for this inquiry; and the results from this survey further informed the subsequent research activities. This survey received very supportive comments from most, including invitations to some VTOS centres around the country which

was encouraging as for this thesis to realise its aims, the support of a number of VTOS coordinators was required and this survey evidenced that support.

This part of the research story was not without its trials and tensions. Harnessing the potential of the online statistical package proved most time consuming. The construction and order of questions contained in the survey had to progress through three pilot phases and concerns were voiced by certain groups within education as to the purpose of this research.

In so many ways this survey was the simplest part of the data collection process as all VTOS coordinators have an understanding of related terminology, a familiarity with computers and of form filling. Coordinators were completely unthreatened in completing the survey as the purpose of the survey was focused on the student, rather than on the coordinator. This point raised interesting considerations for the planned larger quantitative exercise on VTOS students starting in the latter part of 2007, particularly around the language used and presentation of the questions posed.

The most valuable outcome of the initial study from a methodological viewpoint was a greater appreciation of what was to be practically possible. Sample target audiences were revised. As VTOS numbers nationally stand at over five thousand (see Table 1.1, p.19), of which approximately three thousand seven hundred are core, it was originally hoped to get one thousand sample responses as part of the quantitative research. Realistically, a sample of four hundred responses or eleven percent of core students became a more

manageable yet still ambitious target. Focus group targets were also revised downwards to a more achievable target.

The aims realised in the coordinator survey were as follows:

- to construct a profile of VTOS coordinators and the type of learning centres they operate in;
- to uncover the size and type of learning provision taking place in these centres;
- to obtain the views of coordinators as to the motivating factors and obstacles encountered by adult learners accessing VTOS.

The findings relevant to these aims are presented in Chapter Five, part one.

The use of Internet based research software, namely *questionpro.com*, proved a valuable quantitative tool in encouraging greater participation and handling large volumes of statistical data in a reliable form, removing human error from data analysis and facilitating cross referencing of quantitative findings. *Tús maith, leath na hoibre*, which is an old Irish saying translating as *a good start is half the work*.

Ethically conducting this task proved relatively straightforward given that this researcher's peers participating in this online survey were happy to participate, thus ensuring the access required for this thesis. The professional relationship enjoyed between this group of respondents and this researcher ensured a transparent and authentic response to the survey, as no coordinator

at any time felt concerned or even threatened by this survey focus. The respondents appreciated that individual responses were to remain completely confidential and that only aggregate findings were to be disseminated or published. Summary findings of this specific research inquiry with VTOS coordinators were presented at an Annual Meeting of the National Association of VTOS Coordinators (NAVC) on the 17th of April 2008 and more detailed findings were made available to coordinators on request. The Open University Code of Practice (*version thirteen*) for research and those conducting research was observed and upheld throughout, as well as mindful consideration of the Data Protection Act 1998 (UK) and the Data Protection (Amendment) Act 2003 (Republic of Ireland).

Online VTOS student survey

Conducted over a four-month period from November 2007 to February 2008, this large-scale national online survey conducted in over thirty of the approximately one hundred centres around the country, recorded over five hundred valid responses from a national core number at that time of approximately three thousand seven hundred, resulting in a national sample size of fourteen percent using again an online statistical software computer package called *questionpro.com*.

The survey questions were formulated and piloted over a three-month period at the researcher's VTOS centre and a nearby VTOS centre during the

summer of 2007. Given the target audience and the ethical considerations around the construction of the survey, the survey content was submitted to the Human Participants and Materials Ethics Committee (HPMEC) of the Open University for ethical approval that October. Following minor adjustments and some clarifications, the survey contents were approved one month later. This student survey is presented in Word format in Appendix Seven.

Following this drafting process, the survey ready for distribution sought to achieve the following:

- to construct a profile of the VTOS student respondent;
- to construct a profile of VTOS learning provision;
- to discover how students came to access a VTOS programme;
- to uncover student attitudes around adult education issues;
- to uncover student opinions on VTOS specific financial benefits;
- to uncover factors which motivate students to access or join VTOS;
- to discover factors that militated against enrolling on VTOS;
- to discover the students rating of elements of their VTOS experience.

The findings relevant to these aims are presented in Chapter Five, part two.

Following a request by post and e-mail (*see Appendix Four*) sent to all VTOS coordinators in October 2007, approximately one year after the online coordinators' survey, coordinators who had core students were asked to support the distribution and facilitate the completion of an online survey for their students. This survey was to be distributed in November, after the mid-

term break, which is a better time for those working in VTOS as the programme administration pressures would ease at that time.

Forty-two coordinators replied to the request expressing their willingness to facilitate their students' participation in the survey. This request involved more work than some coordinators had anticipated yet in the end the vast majority of these coordinators did facilitate the survey.

Those coordinators willing to participate were sent an instruction manual contained in Appendix Five and a letter contained in Appendix Six to be distributed to the students informing them of the nature and purpose of this survey and inviting them to participate.

In the majority of centres, the numbers of students who were facilitated and completed the survey averaged ten students and early on in this phase of the data collection, it became clear that this researcher would need to visit larger centres to encourage a greater return.

This online survey package called *questionpro.com* had to be accessed via an e-mail address and the survey could only be sent once to a particular address. Each unique link allowed the survey to be completed only once. Many students did not yet have class-related e-mail addresses and some coordinators had reservations about asking students for their personal e-mail addresses for this survey purpose. Thus an early challenge proved to be the availability of e-mail addresses. This challenge was quickly overcome by this researcher, with

the support of a small number of colleagues, creating batches of free e-mail addresses, removing the need to obtain e-mail addresses from students. Then the survey was sent to the batches of e-mails and these batches, with generic passwords, were allocated to coordinators as they requested them. This batch allocation allowed this researcher to record the locations and the number of surveys sent. As the survey link in all cases was anonymised, it was not possible to accurately state how many completed surveys were achieved in any particular centre.

A greater challenge proved to be a security feature within the online survey software which would not permit the survey to be taken from the same physical computer more than once, even where there was a different link and where the survey was being accessed by a different e-mail address. This was the principle reason for the low return from the majority of centres and was most disappointing given the willingness on the part of so many coordinators and, through their feedback, the willingness of the students to participate. The result was that in larger centres the survey response was less than it could have been.

This researcher visited five centres towards the latter part of this process and was allocated a computer room in each centre to facilitate the survey. Using a technique of deleting temporary Internet files on the individual computers, this permitted individual computers to be utilised more than once to complete the survey which facilitated a larger response and completion rate on the particular visits.

In all, seven hundred and thirty-five connections to the survey were made, six hundred and twenty students started the survey and five hundred and two surveys were completed in full. The single biggest reason for the non-completion by one hundred and eighteen students was their being *timed out* for security and validity reasons. The survey had to be completed in one sitting and completed within twenty-five minutes or less. The average time taken to complete the survey was sixteen minutes. For some, the language barrier and for others a lack of basic computer literacy resulted in their being too slow and their responses ultimately were not recorded for this survey. Others also may have been distracted by a mobile phone or a request and as a consequence, when they returned to the survey they would have been timed out.

The responses from such a variety of centres around the country were encouraging and ensured the survey remained nationally representative, even if the number of responses from larger centres in particular was fewer than hoped for. Many large centres have more than one computer room and this improved the response somewhat. This barrier to participation forced this researcher to consider the type of student completing the survey. In all cases the survey was facilitated for class groups and the groups chosen were those for whom it was convenient.

The survey software permitted this researcher to monitor the completion statistics on an ongoing basis, at times even on a daily basis and this

researcher was pleased with the sample participating as the emerging results of the profile of respondent were in line with the national profile. One area of concern appeared to be the low level of participation from those living in a city location. This researcher requested to visit three cities, namely Limerick, Galway and Waterford, and in all cases was most warmly received and supported in ensuring a greater response rate. On each of the one-day visits, this researcher discovered that many students travel from their homes in rural areas to their VTOS programmes in city locations to participate in courses.

Another grouping which emerged as under-represented was those over fifty-six years of age, yet without any intervention the participation rate in this category improved. Given the manner of age banding in national statistics, a direct comparison between this survey's statistics and the national statistics was not possible but overall the survey sample response was in line with national participation statistics as presented in Table 1.1, (p.19) in Chapter One.

As with the previous coordinators survey, the first third of responses was obtained reasonably quickly with one hundred and sixty responses received within the first month. The important ten percent milestone or three hundred and sixty responses were achieved by the end of the second month and in the final month following a number of visits by the researcher, the response number exceeded the five hundred mark. The final completed total was recorded at five hundred and two and the survey package recognised a further sixteen returns, bringing the total response to five hundred and eighteen.

The analytical features of the *questionpro.com* software package allowed for a relatively swift analysis of the data. One challenge particularly in the cross referencing of the questions proved to be in the volume of data. The fruits of this research method are to be found in summary form in Appendix Eight, with summary findings contained in Chapter Five, part two.

Ethically this process with students was very different to the online survey with coordinators. Piloting of the survey proved a longer and more complicated process for this online student survey, as feedback from the piloting process was often varied and students' understanding of questions and even terms differed. Account had to be taken of students with low levels of literacy and of those for whom English was not their first language. What emerged from the exhaustive piloting process was a best effort at getting it right. Given the number of respondents who did not complete the survey within the allocated time, this researcher would not claim the survey was perfect, yet this researcher was satisfied that the response profile resulted in a nationally representative survey.

Accessing these students was an indirect procedure, with local coordinators acting as facilitators. Given the positive experience with coordinators one year previous, sufficient national access to students was achieved and coordinators clearly supported this facilitation as evidenced by the large positive response from students. As evidenced in Appendix Six, it was important to overtly inform the students in as clear and complete a manner as possible whilst not over burdening them before they got to look at the first question. Local

coordinators proved most helpful in ensuring participants understood what was being asked of them and why it was being asked. Participants too understood the role of the researcher and the positionality of the researcher, thus enabling the research participant to make an informed choice and in this researcher's opinion, to give an honest account in their replies. The vast majority of these surveys were completed in a computer classroom setting with a tutor present in the room to answer any questions and to gauge the reaction of students once the survey was completed.

This researcher was present in a number of centres at the time the survey was facilitated and in all cases students were pleased that they had participated, principally as they felt it had given them a voice, which they felt was not listened to on a national stage. This researcher was positively encouraged by the support and interest shown by students in all centres visited and their willingness to contribute to a national study on this VTOS topic, appreciating that they would have moved on as students by the time the survey findings would be presented in published form.

One source of disappointment for this researcher was a group of foreign students, difficult to quantify, but perhaps up to fifty people overall who participated in the survey but who were unable to complete the survey within the time limit and thus did not have their views recorded. This researcher met some of these students on visits to centres and they were disappointed that their views had not been taken into account. English was not their first language and their limited English proved a barrier to completing the survey.

Secondary data collection

The most significant source of secondary documentary evidence collated, compiled and analysed for the purposes of this research inquiry was the national VTOS statistical results, issued by the national VTOS coordinator annually from the Further Education Section of the Department of Education and Science. These useful quantitative findings, presented throughout this thesis, added a nationally complete and historic dimension to elements of the research findings. This was particularly true in the profiling of VTOS students and in the developmental trend of VTOS as a training scheme. Further relevant national data were obtained from the Central Statistics Office through use of their interactive database to further inform the reader on key topics of this research thesis.

The qualitative research methods employed in this research process were two-fold, a one-day workshop with coordinators and four focus groups with students from various parts of the country. A reflective diary was also maintained throughout this research process.

One-day VTOS coordinator workshop

Facilitated on the 13th of May 2008, this qualitative technique was structured around three ninety minute sessions, namely: barriers to accessing VTOS;

motivators to access VTOS; and in the afternoon, a workshop on recommendations arising out of the morning's deliberations on future access issues in VTOS. Two outside facilitators were brought in to assist this researcher and using a *Venn Diagram* approach (*see Appendix Fifteen*) in smaller groups of four coordinators to gather data, a great breadth and depth of discussion took place in each session and each sub-group.

The two morning sessions on barriers and motivators were informed by a ten-minute input from this researcher on the relevant quantitative research findings of both online surveys outlined previously. The afternoon session commenced with a summary presentation of the morning's findings with some observations from the outside facilitators. There then followed a lively discussion which critically explored points raised during the morning.

This researcher initially had not intended to conduct a qualitative workshop of this nature, yet following the overwhelming support from the coordinators to the research inquiry and to a presentation made at an annual meeting of the National Association of VTOS Coordinators on the 17th of April 2008, a workshop was organised with the support of this researcher's employer and every coordinator in the country was invited by post and e-mail (*see Appendix Ten*).

An attendance of sixteen on the day in one of the busiest months of the VTOS academic year was a positive outcome. Summary findings from the coordinators workshop are presented in Chapter Five, part three, and the

verbatim results from this one-day workshop are presented in full in Appendix Eleven.

Student focus groups

These sessions were conducted in May and June 2008 with participants selected by the local coordinators on the basis of it being a broadly representative grouping. Table 4.1 presents the initial sampling strategy.

Table 4.1 Focus group sampling strategy				
Geography	North West	South West	East	Midlands
Centre size	20-40 student	40-60 student	60-100 student	100+ student
Gender type	Female dominated X 2		Equally balanced X 2	
Locality	Small Town	Medium Town	Large Town	City
Age type	21-30 X 3	31-50 X 4	51+ X 3	
Setting	Hotel meeting room X 2		Private classroom X 2	
Group size	10 students in each case			
Duration	1 hour			
Recording	Video camera or Dictaphone			

There was one focus group conducted in each of the four provinces of Ireland. Participation was completely voluntary and those who expressed an interest in participating were issued with a letter of invitation, contained in Appendix Twelve, from the researcher indicating the purpose and format of the focus

group. Each student completed a consent form, contained in Appendix Thirteen, prior to participating and the profile of the focus groups conducted is set out in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2 Focus group profile				
Geography				
Town	Boyle	Athy	Tralee	Letterkenny
Province	Connaught	Leinster	Munster	Ulster
VTOS places	33	65	50	72
Group size	8	9	12	9
Gender type	3 Male 5 Female	4 Male 5 Female	1 Male 11 Female	1 Male 8 Female
Nationality	All Irish	3 Nigerian Female	1 English Female	1 Nigerian & 1 Chinese Female
Date	21-05-08	27-05-08	30-05-08	6-06-08
Duration	59 minutes	58 minutes	42 minutes	49 minutes
Setting	Classroom	Classroom	Classroom	Classroom
Recording	Dictaphone	Dictaphone	Dictaphone	Dictaphone

The centres were chosen as the local coordinators extended an invitation to this researcher and were located within the target sampling regions. The focus group schedule and supporting informative documentation were submitted to the Human Participants and Materials Ethics Committee (HPMEC) of the Open University for ethical approval that April and following revision and clarification of some minor points, approval was obtained on the 16th of May 2008. The focus group schedule is presented in Appendix Fourteen.

Pentti Havukainen (1991: 60), an elderly Finnish thinker, wrote, *the best way to understand the tango is to dance it, not analyse it*. These focus group sessions proved most insightful in appreciating student experiences and realities. From a micro perspective there were many practical considerations to be mindful of, particularly so with the focus group instrument employed. This method is not to be confused with group interview technique. Parker and Tritter (2006: 25-26) differentiate between these two distinct research techniques. In group interviews the researcher adopts an investigative role, questions followed by answers.

Focus groups have a different dynamic with the researcher facilitating and stimulating discussions between the group participants in order to seek out and understand the meanings behind group answers, where the emphasis is on group interaction. Thus for the focus group activity, a logical sequence of open-ended questions that encourage participation by all were required and these questions are presented in Appendix Fourteen.

A risk with this approach is priming. Priming refers to the mechanism by which an attitude is created or influenced by preceding questions. Priming is a context effect described by Tulving and Schacter (1990: 301) as a subconscious form of human memory, based on the idea that an individual's subconscious is triggered by whatever information is available at that time. Throughout each of the focus groups this researcher was most aware of this concern and made every effort to ensure priming did not take place.

Findings from each of the four focus groups principally in a summary verbatim format are presented in Chapter Five, part four. Group level data are distinguished from individual data with 'X' followed by the number in the group offering that same response. For example, if a statement is followed by 'X 4' then four of the group participants felt that response was applicable to them.

Reflective diary

This method, maintained throughout the entire research process, allowed for reflection over a series of weeks, months and years. Emerging opinions and challenges at various stages in the research process were recorded. Observations noted from the numerous VTOS centres visited during the research process were recorded and these notes too assisted in this researcher's reflections. This research process involved ten VTOS centres around Ireland and the meeting of hundreds of students. Each location has its own uniqueness and the cultures of each location share commonalities. This qualitative technique, whilst of limited benefit, has provided a means of recording these observations.

Centres visited during this research inquiry are presented on a national map set out in Diagram 4.2 (p.126). This researcher's centre in Thurles is included on the map, even though no findings contained in this inquiry were obtained from the Thurles centre. VTOS students at the Thurles centre did however

participate in piloting activities. Eight of the ten VTOS centres in Diagram 4.2 are located in very old buildings with five of these eight in former schools for Secondary and Primary students. Two of the buildings visited were modern with one centre a wonderful example of where adult education can be located.



Diagram 4.2 Map of VTOS centres visited

Chapter Five Research findings

Central to this entire formal learning process is the core research question; *what motivates eligible adults to access or enrol on VTOS?* The success or otherwise in attempting to address and answer the research question is determined by the quality, reliability and validity of the data gathered and the processes adopted to analyse that data.

Having previously considered the theoretical conceptual framework encompassing the methodology, strategy and methods in an effort to address the research questions offered in Chapter One, attention now turns to the fruits of that labour. This chapter seeks to present the fruits of that data collection initially in strands, on the basis of the instruments employed, building to a weaving of the strands, towards findings of a mixed, holistic and thematic fashion presented in Chapter Six.

In all, approximately one thousand adults with a VTOS interest participated in this research process over a four-year period, with recorded contributions from approximately six hundred students and one hundred coordinators.

The remainder of this chapter is divided into parts specific to the research methods employed, with the following Chapter Six drawing these strands

together to offer a mixed analysis, with findings and discussion presented in a thematic fashion.

Part one - Findings specific to the online VTOS coordinator survey

Please note; the survey questions are presented in full in Word format in Appendix Two and the results extracted from the survey software package *questionpro.com* are presented in Appendix Three.

Summary findings relating to the first aim: Construct a profile of VTOS coordinators and the type of learning centres they operate in

As summarised in Table 5.1 the majority of VTOS coordinators are female, the majority are well experienced and report to the Adult Education Officer of their organisation, suggesting a high degree of local autonomy.

Table 5.1 Personal profile of VTOS coordinators				
Gender	Male 27.17%		Female 72.83%	
Experience	1-2 year 9.78%	3-5 year 18.48%	6-10 year 39.13%	11+ 32.61%
Report to	AEO 58.70%	CEO 6.52%	Principal 28.26%	Other 6.52%

As summarised in Table 5.2, the size of VTOS centres ranges from small centres with up to twenty students, to the largest centres with in excess of one hundred and twenty students, with the largest number of centres operating with between twenty-one and forty students. Just over half of the centres in

Ireland are core VTOS exclusive, with centres providing multiple adult education provision emerging as the most common setting for VTOS provision. Just over half of the VTOS premises nationally are owned by their VEC and just under half of VTOS premises have remained unchanged for at least the last eleven years. Again there is almost an even split on the question of suitability of physical premises with just over half of the coordinators feeling their building is suitable. This finding was challenged at the coordinators workshop with many commenting that programmes had to be designed around VEC cast-off buildings.

Table 5.2 VTOS centre profile					
Number of places	1-20 19.56%	21-40 28.26%	41-79 25.00%	80-119 11.96%	120+ 15.22%
Allocation	Core only 53.26%		Disperse only 14.13%		Both 32.61%
Centre type	VTOS exclusive 21.74%	Multiple Adult Ed. 40.22%		School 7.61%	PLC 17.39% Other 13.04%
Premises	Owned 56.52%		Rented / Leased 43.48%		
Time spent in current premises	1-5 years 18.48%		6-10 years 33.70%	11+ years 47.82%	
Is premises suitable for needs	Yes 56.52%			No 43.48%	
Centre locality	City 28.26%	Large Town 9.78%		Town 28.26%	Small Town 33.70%
Nearest other centre (miles)	< 5 38.04%	6-10 3.26%	11-30 46.74%	31-40 9.78%	41+ 2.18%
Childcare facilities on site or nearby	Yes 28.26%			No 71.74%	

Table 5.2 demonstrates further that VTOS centres are almost evenly divided between city, town and small town (<10,000). The 2002 national census recognised six hundred and twelve towns. The Further Education Section of the DES identifies one hundred and two VTOS centres and this initial study discovered that twenty-six of those centres are located in cities of which the Republic of Ireland has five recognised cities (*Dublin, Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford*). Thus the remaining seventy-six VTOS centres are serving a country of over six hundred towns. For what is trumpeted as a national adult education scheme, an obvious obstacle has emerged in the form of access, where the majority of VTOS centres are located more than eleven miles away from each other. Centres with between twenty-one and seventy-nine VTOS students make up over half the centres in the country and a similar number of centres have core VTOS students only with a third of centres having both core and dispersed mode students.

Table 5.3 emphasises the feminisation of VTOS amongst the staff and almost half of coordinators stated that they do not have even one full-time VTOS tutor, highlighting the part-time nature of staffing in VTOS.

Table 5.3 VTOS staff profile					
Staff gender profile		Equal 16.3%		Majority female 81.5%	
Full-time tutors	None	1-2	3-5	6-10	11+
	48.91%	21.74%	17.39%	7.61%	4.35%
Part-time tutors	0-3	4-6	9-12	13-16	17+
	38.04%	32.61%	17.39%	7.61%	4.35%

Table 5.4 further emphasises the feminisation of VTOS nationally and these findings are consistent with national figures sourced through the Further Education Section of the DES and offered in Table 1.1 (p.19), of this thesis. Interestingly, exactly half of VTOS coordinators have elected student councils in their centres raising an important consideration for all coordinators.

Table 5.4 VTOS student profile			
Elected student council at centre		Yes 50.00%	No 50.00%
Student gender profile	Equal 26.09%	Majority female 71.74%	Majority male 2.17%

Table 5.5 summarises the findings specific to recruitment with over ninety percent of coordinators filling their allocation of VTOS places each year. Almost seventy percent of respondents believed that if their allocation was increased, they would fill the additional places. Interestingly over thirty percent of coordinators felt if offered additional places, they would not be able to fill them.

Cross referencing analysis indicates that centres in small towns find it more difficult to fill places and are the majority in expressing the view that they would be unable to fill additional places if given them. Coordinators on average use at least five methods to recruit new students, the most popular being encouraging word of mouth.

Table 5.5 Recruitment strategy				
Contact other local agencies	13.59%	Fliers	11.84%	Radio 8.16%
Newspaper	13.79%	Encouraging existing students to encourage others		
Posters	12.62%	Newsletter	9.51%	Education stands 10.49% Other 5.05%
Do you run open days?	No 27.17%	Yes once p.a.	58.70%	Yes > once p.a 14.13%
Filling places	Yes with ease	54.35%	Yes with effort	36.95% No 8.70%
Extra local demand for places	Yes	68.48%	No	31.52%

Summary findings relating to the second aim: Uncover the size and type of learning provision taking place in these centres

Table 5.6 demonstrates that the most popular programme of study is FETAC Level Five, operating in sixty-nine of the ninety-two centres surveyed, followed by the ECDL operating in sixty-two centres. *Note; FETAC is the Further Education and Training Awards Council and is the national awarding body for further education and training in Ireland (further explained previously on page 25 and 26). The ECDL or European Computer Driving Licence is a globally recognised certificate that verifies competence in computer use, through assessing seven components of basic computer applications, including a theoretical dimension.*

Table 5.6 VTOS programme provision						
	Provision Type	Centre number			Provision Type	Centre number
1	FETAC Level 5 award	69		12	City & Guilds	14
2	ECDL	62		13	FETAC Level 2 modules	10
3	FETAC Level 5 modules	60		14	FETAC Level 2 award	8
4	FETAC Level 4 modules	54		15	FETAC Level 1 modules	8
5	Other (See Table 7.7)	35		16	Pitman	7
6	FETAC Level 3 modules	34		17	Microsoft IT	6
7	FETAC Level 4 award	34		18	FETAC Level 1 award	5
8	Leaving Cert. subjects	24		19	Full Junior Certificate	4
9	FETAC Level 3 award	21		20	JEB (I.T. tutor)	1
10	Full Leaving Certificate	21		21	Leaving Cert. Applied	0
11	Junior Cert. subjects	17			Total	494

With four hundred and ninety-four programme options selected by ninety-two coordinators, there are on average five strands of learning programmes available, yet clearly the range of programmes is contingent on student enrolment numbers. Coordinators were asked too if their programme was the same, similar or different to five years ago, with only seven percent saying it was the same. Fifty-eight percent described their programme as similar with thirty-five percent describing their VTOS programmes as different.

The thirty-five *other* results are recorded in Table 5.7 and give a flavour of further depth and breadth to VTOS programme provision nationally. These were recorded by coordinators in the online survey narrative comment box.

Table 5.7 VTOS programme type (recorded in Table 5.6 as <i>other</i>)						
	Provision Type	Centre number			Provision Type	Centre number
1	Access Cert. NUI Maynooth	5		11	FETAC Level 6	1
2	Comptia A+	5		12	IELTS	1
3	OCR	4		13	CCNA	1
4	NUI Access Certificate UCD	2		14	TEFL	1
5	Commercial Examining Board	2		15	FETAC	1
6	IATI	2		16	BTEC	1
7	E-citizen	2		17	IAS	1
8	FIT	2		18	ITEC	1
9	IOFGA Organics Certificate	1		19	RSA	1
10	LAMDA Teaching Diploma	1			<i>Total</i>	35

Summary findings in relation to the final aim: Obtain the views of coordinators as to the motivating factors and barriers encountered by adult learners

The final aim of this coordinator survey was something of an impossible aim and this researcher was surprised at the positive attitude of the coordinators, given the variety of students they encounter, to the four specific questions which related to this aim. Yet Table 5.8 does offer some insight into this issue. In the opinion of VTOS coordinators, women are more motivated and encounter fewer barriers to participate in VTOS. This viewpoint may reflect the fact that at the time of this survey, VTOS nationally was gender imbalanced in favour of females. Men, on the other hand, appear less

motivated and seem to encounter greater barriers in relation to access and participation in VTOS, perhaps explaining their low levels of participation relative to females.

Table 5.8 Motivation factors (including a gender analysis)						
1	Additional monies	Max 5		7	To occupy free time	Max 5
	Male	3.31			Male	2.60
	Female	3.38			Female	2.95
2	To avoid a poor job	Max 5		8	To meet new people	Max 5
	Male	3.21			Male	2.70
	Female	3.41			Female	3.64
3	Boost self-confidence	Max 5		9	Personal ambition	Max 5
	Male	3.03			Male	3.58
	Female	3.96			Female	3.93
4	Professional encourage	Max 5		10	To assist children	Max 5
	Male	2.80			Male	2.30
	Female	3.08			Female	3.43
5	Family or friend encouragement	Max 5		11	Qualification to further education	Max 5
	Male	3.24			Male	3.62
	Female	3.75			Female	3.86
6	To improve education	Max 5		12	Qualification to a job	Max 5
	Male	3.59			Male	4.15
	Female	3.99			Female	4.27

It is the coordinators' consensus opinion that the strongest motivating factor for both genders is qualifications leading to a job, then men are motivated by accessing further studies and women are motivated by boosting self-confidence.

Seeking the views of coordinators on the levels of a variety of obstacles or barriers to students accessing VTOS was an equally challenging question to posit, yet valid trends emerged through the analysis of the data. Clear distinctions emerged between the genders with the overall levels of barrier proving less than the overall levels of motivation recorded in Table 5.8.

Table 5.9 Obstacles (including a gender analysis)						
1	Family commitments	Max 5		8	Low literacy level	Max 5
	Male	2.41			Male	3.54
	Female	4.43			Female	3.15
2	Fear of failure	Max 5		9	Negative school experience	Max 5
	Male	3.58			Male	3.88
	Female	3.43			Female	3.44
3	Feeling too old	Max 5		10	Peer pressure	Max 5
	Male	3.52			Male	3.25
	Female	3.19			Female	2.23
4	Guilt / Feeling selfish	Max 5		11	Pressure on finance	Max 5
	Male	2.29			Male	3.91
	Female	3.18			Female	3.56
5	Lack of information	Max 5		12	Physical disability	Max 5
	Male	3.10			Male	2.48
	Female	2.92			Female	2.31
6	Unavailable for work	Max 5		13	Transport	Max 5
	Male	3.73			Male	2.56
	Female	2.90			Female	2.73
7	Low self-confidence	Max 5				
	Male	3.68				
	Female	3.68				

The level of obstacle encountered by VTOS students demonstrated in Table 5.9 identifies pressure on personal finances as the greatest barrier for males with family commitments the greatest barrier for females.

Ninety percent of centres assist towards the cost of childcare yet in most cases that assistance does not meet the overall childcare cost and furthermore only twenty-eight percent of centres provide childcare on-site or nearby. Almost ninety percent of coordinators feel that the additional financial assistance which VTOS students are entitled to is not adequate in light of the financial cost of returning to learning, again an obvious obstacle to accessing VTOS.

Concluding comments

The findings to the first two aims have proved useful in presenting a national picture of VTOS provision and already some hard evidence is emerging particularly in relation to obstacles or barriers which adults face when looking to engage with adult education.

Coordinators believe barriers are more significant for males with pressure on finances and a negative experience of initial schooling cited as the biggest barriers. Women overall appear to have fewer barriers, however family commitments were clearly shown to be the single biggest barrier for women. This raises many issues but childcare support is the most immediate. Clear findings and hypothesis have emerged from this coordinator's viewpoint, with many findings confirmed and challenged throughout this inquiry process. Yet, beyond answers to questions lie more questions and answers.

Part two - Findings specific to the online student survey

Please note; the survey questions are presented in full in Word format in Appendix Seven and the results extracted from the survey software package *questionpro.com* are presented in Appendix Eight.

The first aim: To construct a profile of the VTOS student respondent

Table 5.10 Student profile							
Gender	Male 29.15% or 151 males			Female 70.85% or 367 females			
Age	21-30 30.5%	31-44 39.96%		45-55 22.20%	56+ 7.34%		
Birth place	Ireland 75.87%		Other EU 8.49%		*Outside EU 15.64%		
* Those outside EU are from 30 different countries with the majority from African nations.							
Marital status	Married 42.66%	Single 38.42%	Co-habiting 7.92%		Divorced/Separated 8.49%		Other 2.51%
Welfare status	Disability 14.67%	Credits 4.44%	Other 8.3%	Unemployed 54.25%		Dependent 2.12%	One parent 16.22%
VTOS year	1 st year 55.02%		2 nd year 39.19%			3 rd year 5.79%	
Education standard profile							
Level (on entry)	Primary 11.39%	Junior Cert. 30.89%	LCA 2.9%	L. Cert. 27.99%	>L. Cert. 12.93%	Other 7.34%	None 6.56%
Geography and transport profile							
Travel	<1mile 25.68%		1-3 miles 27.22%		4-8miles 20.85%		9+ miles 26.25%
Mode	Drive 58.3%		Lift 9.85%	Public 8.1%		Walk/Bike 22.6%	Other 1.15%
Living	City 21.04%		Large town 13.71%		Town 27.8%	Village/Country 37.45%	

The second aim: To construct a profile of VTOS students’ learning provision

Table 5.11 Programme provision for students				
Description of the current educational level of programme pursued				
Level 3 9.46%	Level 4 13.90%	Level 5 66.80%	Don’t know 5.98%	Other 3.86%
Description of the learning environment				
Adult ed. exclusive 81.85%		Part of school 7.14%	Part of PLC 6.95%	Other 4.06%
VTOS course length	Too long 6.82%	Just right 65.69%	Too short 27.49%	

The third aim: To discover how students came to access a VTOS programme

Table 5.12 Pre-decision making process – awareness						
How students came to discover about VTOS						
FÁS	Poster/ Flier	Welfare	Friend/ Relative	Paper/ Radio	Guidance	Other
11.78%	11.00%	8.69%	41.12%	13.32%	8.30%	5.79%
Before commencing VTOS did the student consider other course options?						
Yes I considered options 36.87%			No I did not 63.13%			
Did the student participate in other course training options within 5 years?						
No 50.77%		1 - 3 courses 45.95%		4+ courses 3.28%		
How students described their initial school experience						
Very bad 7.34%		Bad 21.24%		Good 54.05%		Very good 17.37%

The fourth aim: To uncover student attitudes to adult education issues

Table 5.13 Attitudinal views of students				
I like studying the content		Agree 92.63%	Disagree 2.79%	Don't know 4.58%
I enjoy learning with others		Agree 97.23%	Disagree 0.99%	Don't know 1.78%
Adult education is a help with life changes		Agree 94.09%	Disagree 2.56%	Don't know 3.35%
Money should be spent on adult education		Agree 94.85%	Disagree 1.59%	Don't know 3.56%
Adult education makes me feel better		Agree 95.64%	Disagree 1.58%	Don't know 2.78%
I am a better learner than friends outside		Agree 40.57%	Disagree 35.94%	Don't know 23.49%
I am a better learner than my fellow students		Agree 25.71%	Disagree 47.14%	Don't know 27.15%
I think my class work is very good		Agree 75.00%	Disagree 6.60%	Don't know 18.40%
I think my contribution in class is very good		Agree 73.49%	Disagree 6.03%	Don't know 20.48%
My attitude to learning has improved		Agree 90.84%	Disagree 4.78%	Don't know 4.38%
Looking to the future, likely completion and further study				
Completion	Yes definite 71.04%	Probably 22.59%	Not sure 5.79%	No 0.58%
Future study (after VTOS)		Yes 82.43%	No 17.57%	

The fifth aim: To uncover student opinions on VTOS specific financial benefits

Table 5.14 Financial issues			
Is the training bonus sufficient?	Yes 28.77%	No 53.62%	Not app. 17.61%
Is the meal allowance sufficient?	Yes 14.15%	No 78.39%	Not app. 7.46%
Is the mileage allowance sufficient?	Yes 17.03%	No 53.86%	Not app. 29.11%
Is the childcare allowance sufficient?	Yes 20.64%	No 33.67%	Not app. 45.69%
Are the class materials sufficient?	Yes 77.89%	No 19.12%	Not app. 2.99%
How does returning to adult education leave you financially?	Better off 25.29%	Worse off 29.15%	The same 45.56%

The sixth aim: To uncover factors which motivate students to access VTOS

Table 5.15 Motivating factors and level					
Motivating factor	Level of motivation				
<i>Expressed as percentages</i>	Not	Low	Medium	High	Highest
To avail of additional monies	57.55	13.08	16.30	9.05	4.02
To avoid a poor job	39.96	8.23	14.06	20.48	17.27
To boost self-confidence	8.58	4.79	16.77	35.13	34.73
Encouraged by a professional	43.95	6.65	16.34	22.78	10.28
Encouraged by a family or friend	26.16	6.24	21.33	27.16	19.11
To improve overall education	4.38	1.99	8.37	31.08	54.18
To occupy free time	39.44	11.67	20.92	18.31	9.66
To meet new people	16.40	8.60	27.80	25.40	21.80
To achieve a personal ambition	6.99	3.19	10.38	31.14	48.30
To assist children/grandchildren	48.59	6.63	15.26	14.26	15.26
Qualification to further education	12.20	5.40	11.20	26.20	45.00
Qualification leading to a job	8.37	3.59	9.56	21.71	56.77

The seventh aim: To discover factors that militated against enrolling on VTOS

Table 5.16 Barrier or obstacle factors and level					
Barriers		Level of Barrier			
<i>Expressed as percentages</i>	Not	Low	Medium	High	Highest
Family commitments	47.33	11.68	19.40	12.48	9.11
Fear of failure	42.32	17.56	21.56	12.77	5.79
Feeling too old	60.92	12.63	13.62	8.62	4.21
Guilt / Feeling selfish	68.55	12.70	13.10	3.23	2.42
Lack of information	43.58	17.72	20.77	10.39	7.54
Unavailable for work	51.02	13.93	15.17	9.43	10.45
Low self-confidence / self-esteem	43.12	13.16	22.47	10.93	10.32
Low literacy level	67.27	10.71	11.92	4.65	5.45
Negative school experience	49.49	11.72	16.77	9.49	12.53
Peer pressure	76.32	10.32	6.89	4.45	2.02
Pressure on personal finance	47.17	11.74	17.20	13.77	10.12
Physical disability	81.91	6.10	5.28	3.25	3.46
Transport	72.64	7.24	8.44	5.84	5.84

The eighth and final aim: To discover student satisfaction with elements of their VTOS experience

Table 5.17 VTOS student satisfaction ratings				
<i>Expressed as percentages</i>	Most unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Satisfactory	Very satisfactory
Centre location	6.24	7.21	46.00	40.55
Centre appearance	6.46	9.59	56.75	27.20
Centre atmosphere	4.92	4.13	45.67	45.28
Range of courses	5.29	9.62	55.29	29.80
Quality of courses	3.76	1.58	50.30	44.36
Your timetable	4.71	4.70	54.90	35.69
Class length	3.96	7.12	54.46	34.46
Length of breaks	5.09	9.00	57.34	28.57
Holiday lengths	3.33	2.74	48.24	45.69
I.T. facilities	5.52	8.09	41.22	45.17
Class facilities	3.93	9.43	50.88	35.76
Qualifications offered	3.97	2.77	50.60	42.66
Public perception of centre	4.36	10.89	58.02	26.73
Learner support	3.94	4.54	45.17	46.35
Rules of the centre	4.77	1.99	53.28	39.96

Part three - Findings of the VTOS coordinator workshop

Please note; the complete recorded account from the workshop on barriers and the workshop on motivation is presented in Appendix Eleven, including the prompting questions utilised on the day. What follows is a summation of the sub-group consensus comments achieved through a *Venn Diagram* approach. A brief explanation of the *Venn Diagram* approach is offered in Appendix Fifteen.

Workshop 1: Exploring barriers experienced by students

Using the conceptual obstacles to accessing adult education as outlined in the literature review of Chapter Two, the findings of this workshop on barriers are presented under the following five headings; institutional, informational, situational, personal/dispositional and contextual.

Institutional barriers

The strict admissions policy of VTOS means for many adults their ineligibility proves an insurmountable barrier. The national cap on VTOS numbers at an official figure of five thousand, though in reality the number can reach up to five thousand five hundred, is a significant obstacle which has been in place for many years and the dramatic increase in those unemployed in recent times in Ireland forces a reappraisal of this cap. The lack of childcare availability and the insufficient childcare allowance on VTOS were cited also

as was the length of the programme which is up to forty-three weeks of class contact per year. The length of the VTOS week, at up to thirty hours class contact per week, also compounds the difficulties of maintaining their personal lives with all its responsibilities and participating on this full-time scheme. Similar formal adult education provision is less time onerous for example the PLC (Post Leaving Certificate) sector, which typically runs for up to thirty weeks per year and usually involves twenty class contact hours per week. Other part-time options in the form of BTEI were identified as obstacles to VTOS, as many people fear the challenge of full-time education. Opting for part-time is acknowledged as appropriate for some but perhaps not for others.

VTOS centres have limited financial resources and these budgets have remained at low levels through the boom years of the *Celtic Tiger*, restricting provision and choice and resulting in an obstacle in the form of a more limited provision. Coordinators cited a shortage of tutors trained in adult education methodologies as an obstacle. It was further commented that tutors without adult education competencies have the potential to create great difficulties for students and for centres as word of mouth may not always be positive, therefore creating a barrier. Financial limitations restrict physical resources, particularly premises capacity and equipment; these restrict human resources in terms of staffing and result in an annual battle to make limited finances stretch as far as possible. Restricted finances result in large class sizes and large class size was cited as an obstacle to accessing VTOS.

The lack of a visible support structure was cited as a contributing obstacle to VTOS, yet this is now less of a barrier since the national introduction of the Adult Guidance Service. A lack of inter-agency cooperation between providers was cited as an obstacle both within and outside the VEC structure. There was a consensus that the structure of education funding creates a *silo effect* for provision, reducing the opportunities for coordinated local delivery of adult education.

A lack of progress from years of lobbying Ministers for Education, making cases to VECs and Department of Education & Science officials and other agencies for improvements for VTOS learners was identified as an obstacle today. This is highlighted by the example of the paltry meal and travel allowances paid to VTOS students.

Informational barriers

A lack of information or awareness of VTOS and the programme options, as well as the lack of a profile for VTOS locally and nationally was cited as a contributing obstacle. Recognition was given to the expansion of the Adult Guidance Service as a positive step to addressing this obstacle.

Situational barriers

VTOS-eligible adults are amongst the poorest adults in our society and this is a significant obstacle for unemployed adults wishing to participate in VTOS. Loss of potential to earn income at a time of near full employment and surviving on social welfare rates for two years were also cited. Money talks and other adult education options most notably FÁS and PLC have more favourable financial incentives for participation, creating an obstacle as many students' decisions are influenced by financial considerations rather than the appropriateness of a particular course. Transport was cited as an obstacle due to the diffuse nature of VTOS provision.

Adults in low-paid employment and spouses in the home where the other spouse is working, emerged as the real disadvantaged and the group with the greatest obstacles. This group often have to pay for formal education and for many families with modest incomes the cost of returning to education is viewed as an unaffordable luxury.

Personal and dispositional barriers

A lack of self-confidence and self-belief on the part of the potential student emerged as a significant obstacle. Negative previous experience of formal education was also cited as an obstacle, yet it was noted that for the majority of students surveyed online, their initial school experience was largely a positive one. Fear of failure was recognised as a significant and real obstacle. Health issues are a barrier particularly given that those in receipt of short-term

and long-term disability payments are eligible to apply for VTOS. Age was also cited as a barrier by the coordinators, with some adults feeling too old to pursue further studies.

Contextual barriers

The feminisation of VTOS emerged as an obstacle for young men particularly, with many feeling uncomfortable with the class mix. Coordinators identified somewhat aggressive traits in young men caught in a masculinity mindset of earning rather than learning.

Family responsibilities, not just childcare but eldercare emerged as an obstacle including students' responsibilities for children of all ages not just at pre-school age. Language is an obstacle for some immigrants also.

Workshop 2: Exploring factors which influence students to access VTOS

First aim: What factors would create more motivated learners?

Creating an adult-learning environment with experienced adult education tutors, developing building-block successes through continuous assessment models, emphasising skills demonstrations over examinations for students learning at their own pace, and realising nothing succeeds like success emerged as the dominant consensus factors from discussions.

A physical environment appropriate for adult education in the twenty-first century with crèche facilities, parking facilities and a multi dimensional awareness programme including student participation in open days were also identified as significant factors towards more motivated learners.

Coordinators recognised the need for a programme with a focus on the progression options of using new skills and qualifications towards employment and/or further studies, with integrated guidance support through the programme timeframe. Students prefer the status of being a full-time student rather than being unemployed.

A lifting of the national cap and an increase in funding would increase the capacity of VTOS to deliver to a wider audience, making VTOS more

accessible for more adults. Greater integration with local and national agencies would ensure that scarce resources are used more effectively.

Second aim: What motivates adults to access VTOS?

Potential students' previous educational experience in terms of initial schooling and in terms of other courses they may have been involved in can prove most influential. This point also emerged strongly through the student online survey and focus groups. Past tutors, past successes, previous satisfaction and enjoyment in learning can positively influence students' motives to participate. Peer example and support as well as family support serve to improve the likelihood of students accessing VTOS.

Discussions took place on the negative motivators such as perceived threats from social welfare and FÁS along the lines that social welfare entitlements could be reduced or stopped if they did not engage in further training. As highlighted in the literature review, these are weak motivators in the short-term and potentially damaging in the long-term, as it was widely agreed that accessing VTOS must be at an age- and stage-appropriate time for each adult.

Shared learning is a motive with shared enjoyment, shared achievement and shared successes. It also improves the personal and interpersonal skills of students. The positive word of mouth which results further motivates others in the form of peer support towards accessing VTOS. It was noted that many

students feel improving their education is more attractive than certain types of employment.

It was noted that those for whom additional financial supports were the principle motive for accessing the programme were most likely not to start the course or to leave the course early. This comment again was validated through the online student survey and the focus group sessions. It must be noted though that all student respondents were making their views known from inside VTOS. Coordinators felt that perhaps student views on the financial implications and other matters would have been more varied had the questions been asked of these students prior to their being accepted onto VTOS.

The greatest motivator of all noted in the workshop was personal ambition on the part of the student, where students make statements like this one from a focus group; *I have always wanted a second chance*. This intrinsic motive in the opinion of coordinators is the motive most likely to see students access and then successfully participate in VTOS. This consensus on the part of the coordinators at the workshop overall is very much evidencing and supporting the theories offered by Knowles *et al.* (2005) discussed in the literature review in Chapter Two in relation to motivation and andragogy.

Part four - Summary verbatim account from the focus groups

Section one

When and where did you first hear about VTOS?

Focus group one

Whilst on a part-time course the VTOS coordinator visited our class and informed us, X 4.

A billboard outside the centre.

My sister already knew about VTOS and told me.

My husband told me about it.

Newspaper advertisement.

Focus group two

A friend of mine who would have come here before, X 2.

A friend of a friend.

The local FÁS office, X 2.

A guy delivering Chinese one night was down here doing a course and he told me about it.

I was driving by and I saw the poster.

My husband told me about it.

I read about it in the local paper and I made a call.

Focus group three

In the citizens advice centre in town, X 2.

In the youth information centre, I was looking for work but found out about the course.

Word of mouth, a relative who saw it advertised.

A tutor from a FÁS course.

Word of mouth, a friend of mine who had done the course, X 2.

My sister-in-law had a brother who was going to do it and I heard about it then.

Through another course I was doing, I had to investigate local training opportunities.

Focus group four

A tutor on another course told me, X 2.

A friend told me, X 3.

My neighbour, X 2.

Local newspaper, X 2.

A flier in a shop.

From a relative.

The coordinator visited our work after we heard we were being made redundant.

When and where did you hear about the course you chose to do?

Focus group one

At the course induction/start, X 5.

Through the paper advert.

At an open day, heard from a Second-year student.

From my sister.

Focus group two

Once I came in, then I learned what was on offer, X 6.

I learned about computers first from a friend, then learned about VTOS, X 3.

Focus group three

On a leaflet when I called in.

Adult Education Guidance Initiative appointment, X 2.

At an adult education fair in a local hotel.

Through my friend, X 3.

Citizens Information Centre.

Through a family member.

Focus group four

At the open day, X 9.

From a friend who was a former student, X 2.

The advert had quite a lot of information.

When and where did you hear about your VTOS centre?

Focus group one

Asked for directions in the town.

Was a former student years before, the centre is the old tech, X 4.

My sister found out for me, X 2.

Once I heard it was in the old tech, I knew where it was.

Focus group two

I was told where to go but I couldn't find it, the signage is unclear, X 5.

My husband knew where it was and he brought me.

I passed it by several times.

I went into youthreach next door.

A friend brought me.

Focus group three

I knew it was here, I had done voluntary work here before.

I was given directions but still couldn't find it so I rang the centre and they helped me.

I knew about it already, it was the old tech, X 4.

It's near the cathedral so I had my landmark and found it easy enough, X 2.

A friend of mine brought me.

Focus group four

I had no idea, I phoned for directions.

I got directions from the person who told me about VTOS, X 5.

I found it myself from the details on the flier.

A relative brought me, X 3.

It took me a few goes, but I found it.

I went in next door and they pointed me in the right direction.

Was VTOS a return to education for you or a continuation in adult education?

Focus group one

Return, X 4.

Continuation from previous full-time adult courses, X 2.

Continuation from previous part-time adult courses, X 2.

Focus group two

Return, X 3.

Continuation from previous part-time adult courses, X 6.

Focus group three

Continuation from previous full-time adult courses, X 4.

Return, X 5.

Focus group four

Return, X 9.

Continuation from previous part-time adult course, X 3.

[Note: Overall VTOS was a return to adult education for twenty-one of the focus group students, a continuation in adult education from part-time adult education for eleven and a continuation from full-time education for six.]

What were you doing immediately prior to starting your VTOS programme?

Focus group one

Sitting at home bored.

Relocated to rural Ireland from working in Dublin.

Farming & doing a part-time course.

Part-time domestic paid work.

Housewife, now kids are in school, X 2.

FÁS course, X 2.

Focus group two

I was sitting at home bored, X 2.

I was living here three years and no social life at all. I didn't meet anybody so it was great to come here...from the extreme isolation.

I was working and wanted a career change.

I was working but due to cancer I was at home.

I was retired from work and at home.

I was out of the work scene and that bit isolated.

I was working but then was out injured, then lost my job because of my injury.

I was busy working voluntarily with my church.

Focus group three

I was on a summer break from a course, X 4.

I was at home with a small baby.

Working as a plasterer.

Full-time mum at home, X 3.

Focus group four

At home minding kids, X 3.

Just out of work, X 3.

Working part-time, X 3.

Out of work, X 3.

Section two

Motivation – What interested you in the idea of your VTOS course and what were the reasons for your decision to do the course?

Focus group one

Computers number one and it then drew me to other subjects.

Qualifications to enhance my work experience...I have the experience but not the qualifications.

To build on the two modules I had done previously...to give me an edge when I go to looking for a job.

I have a child with special needs, so I wanted to further my education.

For years I worked in wholesalers and shops... I thought if I got the qualifications I could step up to management.

I noticed all the jobs I was going for you had to be computer literate... and I wasn't.

I didn't like school when I was young, it was probably my own fault... I liked doing a part-time course for adults and wanted to do more.

I wanted to learn more, just to learn more.

Focus group two

I saw opening doors for adult education...I saw it as my A level to university.

Basically computers...anything I knew was self-taught and I wanted to learn more. I had always worked on the manual side of construction and I wanted to get into the business end because my injury forced me to find a different

career. During the year others in the class talked me into doing other modules like drama and I have loved it.

For me it was art...and then doors started opening, like computers. I always had a dream about going to Third-level...maybe next year.

Working as a carer is what interested me...I wanted an award (qualification) in that area and to work in that area. The work experience module taught me that really it was not quite what I wanted and I am now focusing on working as a social worker and I am happy.

I wanted to learn about my creativity...that's what drew me in...I needed to change jobs because of stress and heart problems. Working in the corporate world, stress, long hours...I was told by doctors I had to change...(the course) it has hugely helped my health and my life, mentally and physically.

To find direction in life and to develop my social skills, maybe make a few friends. I got separated about five years ago, I have two children, I went to hell completely, living on the street at one stage, I wanted to pick myself up off the ground and I want my sons to be proud of me and to be able to be there for my children.

Having had to give up work because of cancer...I needed something to fill the gaps between treatment...I found art and psychology very helpful. I also became separated around this time and found it very difficult, I was stuck in the house and then just everything piled on top. I needed to get out, the art was great. I found it very therapeutic. Being in a group was great as before I would never have mixed, I would have been in the house with my kids, that was it, so coming here would have been the first time I mixed since I was in school.

I wanted to get back to work. On my own most of the time, social reasons first, academic second.

I wanted to enhance my existing qualifications.

Focus group three

I felt I could do a lot but I had nothing on paper...I wanted qualifications. I had a life changing experience and left a job which I just didn't like, and I though I have nothing to lose.

When I came to this country I wanted different work to what I was doing back home, I wanted to get qualifications to allow me work in the childcare area. I came from a different place, a different culture, so when I came to this country I found things quite different and I wanted to learn about this culture.

I wanted to do my Leaving Cert. to get qualifications to get into college or to get a full-time job. I just wanted to do it there and then because if I put it off I might never do it. I wanted to be able to support myself and my son. It has given me confidence, given me a goal.

I wanted to do the Leaving Cert. to open doors to my future, to get a career. I regretted not doing my Leaving Cert. I wanted to get away from the back pain of plastering!

I left school early and I was thinking I needed my Leaving Cert., and that's what I wanted to do. You need the Leaving for nearly everything. I didn't want to go back to the jobs I had before.

For the future...in this country you need skills...computers are in demand...everywhere you are using computers so I want to use the technology and have an advantage...to get a career.

I wanted to learn computers, I wouldn't touch one before, I was afraid of them...I am not afraid any more. I wanted a career or maybe further education. It got me out of the house and got my confidence built up because after I had my daughter I was in the house all the time...it got me out and about, chatting to other people...building my confidence...we haven't time to be bored now.

I wanted a qualification that would leave me employable in an area that would suit me at the age and stage that I am at...and where I see myself in the future. The sting was taken out of the decision because there are no fees, everything is here, childcare assistance is paid, it was in school hours, out at school holidays, flexible in that if there was a day when you couldn't be in, you know they would work around that...there is a lot going for it...there is someone there all the time if you are stuck.

I have a part-time job working in a school...and thought doing the course would help me in my job and it has, big time.

[Note: Five of the nine people raised their hands when prompted would boredom have been a factor for you prior to starting the course.]

Focus group four

I never did a Leaving Cert. and I wanted to go back and do the Leaving Cert. I thought it would be good for me. I wanted to prove to myself that I was able to do it.

I just wanted to do more for myself. I didn't want to be at home all day long.

I always wanted to do my Leaving Cert. since I left school. A change of scene, it allowed me to meet new people.

Getting some qualifications, I worked all my life in England and I found it very difficult to get a job here because I hadn't got the education qualifications...To get me out of the house and to get my brain a bit more active. I wanted the challenge.

To better myself. To meet people and to get my brain going.

Well I was thinking of going on to Third-level and this was the stepping stone. The discipline of having to do a bit of study, to see if I could stick it.

It was a spur of the moment thing, it was a place to come, having been made redundant after thirty-seven years and it was an ideal opportunity to make a change. It was an opportunity and I took it.

I was interested in Third-level but I had left school (thirty years ago) hardly able to read and write, even though I got quite good results in my Leaving...I had a fear of going to Third-level and this course helped me to cope with the fear. It also helped in that I was no more the taxi service for my teenage daughter. It gave me back some of my life.

I just wanted to see could I do it. My mother always said I had to go back, but I never listened, but then I finally went back and I am proud of myself.

It was a spur of the moment thing for me as I wasn't long out of work and I hate not doing something so I heard about it and I said I would chance it. It keeps you from doing nothing.

Mainly it was the computers, but since I have come I have found many other great subjects. I was getting up everyday and turning on the tv, a couch potato, I didn't want to be a zombie.

I always wanted to do my Leaving Cert. and to better my education. I like a challenge and we all work for one another, it's a happy unit. I had no idea what it would be like but it was a great surprise. I'll be sixty next year and I want to keep up with things...I want to keep in tune...you have a better outlook because things change.

What encouragement (if any) did you receive when you were making the decision to do the VTOS course?

Focus group one

None.

My husband...he thought I could achieve more.

From a flexible childcare provider who helped, particularly with after school care.

My mum.

Some of the lads from the previous part-time course...encouragement amongst each other.

Loads from everyone, husband, mum, brother.

My family and the lads.

My sister.

My kids, X 4.

My eleven year old says, 'mam isn't it brilliant that you are in school'.

My seven and five year old say we are all off to school and dad's off to work.

My three year old thinks I am at work.

We have four kids from eighteen down to three, we all sit there and do our homework together...it has pushed the kids to work more at homework.

Focus group two

I had the full support of my family, X 4.

I had no encouragement because there was nobody there, but I needed to get myself going.

The guy who told me about the course gave me a bit of encouragement.

My two boys pushed me.

I was encouraged by a lady in FÁS first, and then my husband said yes – maybe you will get out of the house now!

A friend of mine was encouraging and my family were great to talk to.

Focus group three

The tutors on my previous course were very encouraging.

None before but lots since I came in, X 2.

Family support, particularly to help with children.

Family and friends, X 4.

None.

Focus group four

My mother really encouraged me, X 2.

Family, X 3.

None, X 7.

Section three

Barriers – Were there things that made your decision to start the course more difficult?

Focus group one

It's very daunting, you just don't think about it too long, just try it...you can always leave.

My elderly mother and aunt require time and care.

Childminding.

I worried about the farm and the heifers...I live ten miles from here, I worried that the car would break down, luckily enough it didn't. There was no one coming into town from that area, it's (the car) an old banger but it serves the purpose.

Guilt about the money...I probably could have got a job, but I was pandering to my needs.

It's not advertised, people just don't know...VTOS and the qualifying criteria. A lot of my friends who would be housewives would love to come back...would love to do education...love to do part-time or courses in the morning when their kids are at school but they can't get on the course because they haven't got the criteria and that's where an awful lot of people are caught as well.

The thought of coming back and being treated like a child.

I suffer with anxiety so I was terrified of coming, even though I wanted to meet people, it's hard, that is what was scaring me the most, the first three weeks were brutal but I am enjoying it now.

I was living twelve miles out in the countryside and I don't have any transport so my sister transported me at first but she couldn't do it every day, so she helped me find accommodation in town which made it much easier for me.

Peoples opinion's of it in the town...when people heard what I was doing they would say don't be stupid...go out and get yourself a job...people's opinions were we were time wasting, they didn't realise we were doing something.

Yeah, they say oh you're on VTOS it's a bit of a doddle.

You do feel guilty because you are getting the money and you could be working.

Focus group two

I wondered could I afford to do it...having given up a well paid job.

I was the same, a girlfriend, two boys and no one working, but then I didn't have much of a choice because of the injury which forced me to look at a career change.

For me it was my small children, it was very difficult, we couldn't get a minder so my husband changed his shift work to nights to mind the children when I am in school.

Yes when I came here first, four years ago, I was told I did not have my papers for a long enough time and that I could not do the course...so I had to wait, it was a closed door...but now my grown up children think it has made me more lively and that it has made me look younger.

My kids were small and that was very difficult but now that they are a bit older and are in school...and my husband helps.

A commitment to having to get up in the morning...when you don't even have a routine for so long.

Focus group three

It's hard to come back, especially money wise. If I go on to college it will then be five years of this (lack of money) but it would be worth it in the end up. I am definitely going to college after this. This year has given me more confidence to go to college.

Children, having to drop kids off to school but not drop them too early and still getting to the course on time, getting back on time, getting relatives to mind them on in-service days and there are some days you wonder why am I bothering.

Children as well, getting baby sitters, crèches are very expensive... I get the (childcare) allowance (€63.50 per week) but most of the crèches are €130 per week and then travelling up everyday, that's a lot of money on petrol...thirty miles up and then thirty miles back down every day.

I have a forty mile journey each way each day to do my course, you get the (mileage) allowance but it doesn't cover the cost, but it helps.

Creche costs.

Confidence, going back into a classroom with other people.

My home situation,...my husband has three elderly relatives living at home and the help situation there was not good...there were responsibilities there...guilt was a big part for me.

Focus group four

I have two children and I wasn't sure would they go to the crèche, only for the support of the crèche staff I wouldn't have started. I felt guilty and even pulled out but my sister was sticking it (returning to education) so I went back, and it was the best thing I ever did.

If the kids are sick you just have to miss a few days and that's difficult...If you miss a few days, you miss a whole lot of work.

Would I be able for the work load, would I blend in with everyone, its so hard going back studying after eight years, it's hard but I wouldn't change it for the world.

Childcare and fear, having the confidence to meet new people and could I do the work.

No barriers, X 5.

School was a very negative experience for me in the past and I wasn't sure about coming back, it's totally different to my first experience.

Fear and anxiety especially in the writing, but my writing has improved with a lot of encouragement from the staff.

Having a visual impairment I found my initial schooling hard, there wasn't half the assistance there is now, so for me to come back it was very very hard, even after I came here I felt initially I couldn't ask anyone for help, I kept a lot to myself, but as I got on in the course I found it easier to ask for help and I got the help, I am not one hundred percent comfortable asking but I am getting there.

Did you previously consider doing a similar type of course but did not do the course, if so what stopped you from doing the course then?

Focus group one

[None out of eight.]

Focus group two

[One out of nine.]

Yes I came here first and was not long enough on social welfare, I had to wait for a year and I did come then.

Focus group three

[Eight out of the nine].

I thought about a FÁS course but the times would not have been at all suitable, with my children, X 3.

I was looking at another course but it cost too much and I was not entitled to any grant.

I started a course in another town but the travel was too much and I left.

I looked at a distance course, it cost too much and I didn't think I would stick at it.

Yes, my child, I was waiting for him to grow a bit bigger and get going to school.

Yes, the situation with elder care at home meant that I couldn't do the course in the previous year. There was a lack of support at home at that time.

Focus group four

[Four out of the twelve.]

Thought about college but got pregnant and that put that idea on hold.

Thought about doing a FÁS course but the hours made it totally impossible.

I was pushed by social welfare to do an accounting course but I just could not see myself working in that area, and I refused that one...but I was delighted to do this one.

I applied for a PLC course but the places were full, so I applied here.

Do you know others who considered doing a similar or the same course but in the end did not, if so what do you think stopped them from taking the course?

Focus group one

[Three of the eight participants said they did.]

Afraid more than anything else and others were set in their ways and maybe did not want to change.

Some people wouldn't have the patience...to learn computers.

It's all too much for some...people put pressure on themselves...even sitting down in the one place for two hours.

Focus group two

[Six of the nine participants said they did.]

Yes they were just not eligible, X 3.

Comment - Six months is not a lot of time to be on social welfare, but when you have come from working all your life and just want to get moving, six months is too long, then social welfare are sending letters asking what jobs have you applied for, when you want to retrain and do a course... It's a real downer for people... if I had been told I would have to wait for six or twelve months after I came in here first, I wouldn't have come back...it's stupid really.

Yes the money is just not enough to consider returning to full-time education...couldn't survive.

Childcare stopped people. One girl just didn't have the support to help with her child...and she was a single mother...childcare is expensive.

A friend in a low paid job considered doing VTOS to try and improve her life but couldn't survive without that money...not on the social welfare so she has to stay working.

Focus group three

[Four of the nine participants said they did.]

There was a young man, but he had no confidence in himself whatsoever, he left very quickly.

A friend with a small baby had no support.

Grasp of the English language kept one girl out.

Confidence and lack of support kept someone out.

Focus group four

[Two of the twelve participants said they did.]

I have a relative I have been encouraging for months but it is just the fear, and she just makes excuses, but I know the real thing is the fear.

My mum would not be the best at reading and writing, but I know she would benefit from here...I know she would love it here but she is just afraid.

In your opinion, what would make it easier for people to start a VTOS course?

Focus group one

Initially start at Level Three even for three months, and allow people to work up.

Timetables to better suit children, reduce breaks, leave out lunchtime and work through.

I don't know what it is but there is some stigma attached to the course.

Yeah, it's like you are on a doss.

Yeah someone described it to me as a drop in centre.

I get, oh you get paid for it.

I get, who are you with your training.

More flexibility with timetables.

The monetary end...reward the people...it's the money.

Focus group two

VTOS should be offered also as a part-time option perhaps with evening classes.

Childcare supports need to be improved...we need a crèche here.

The financial supports need to be improved.

A better carpark.

A lot of people wouldn't know about it...more communication or advertising is needed...people do not know what it (VTOS) has to offer you, it has a lot to offer you if you are ready to get it.

A higher profile of what is achievable here, people will say to me 'FETAC, what's that?' People think ah she is only amusing herself in that course.

For people whose husbands are working they are just not eligible, that's wrong.

The words are confusing FETAC, VTOS, Modules, Levels, Awards, Portfolios, Merits, Distinctions, Pass, you just don't have a clue even after you start.

People get frightened and get overwhelmed and they feel they are the only ones who feel like that, everybody is in the same boat, but nobody says anything and it can feel like you are back in school.

Focus group three

The childcare allowances.

More centres in wider geographic areas.

More broadcasting or advertising, X2.

The leaflets might well be in places like social welfare but the staff should be better informing people of the other options.

More places.

Childcare places.

Funding for adult education from the Government.

The fear, the fear of going back...if there could be a motivating talk by a former student...I think if you had ordinary people talking about their experience of it to people who had left school at thirteen or fourteen and are now in their forties looking to change career, it's not easy. Some people are in their twenties and it may sound very easy, when you get to your forties and your whole life is different to what it was even ten years before and you know you want to be in the workforce for the next twenty-five years, you know you have big decisions to make, it can be difficult and sometimes it's just the fear that holds you back.

Focus group four

It needs to be better advertised. VTOS was an unheard of. (All nodded).

It's only word of mouth and we were lucky to hear it.

Everything is geared towards FÁS, and employers and social welfare only speak of FÁS, they don't know about VTOS.

The local radio stations should be used to interview coordinators and even students themselves, it would make it easier for people, to hear the stories, it would give more confidence.

Programmes on the tv about improving literacy really encourage people.

Closing comments***Focus group one***

Since I have had my kids, it's the best thing I have ever done. To me VTOS has boosted my confidence, my education, I feel like I am a lot better person for it. I have enjoyed it, it's a shame it has to end next year.

I find it makes people enjoy education, we can talk as adults, we can help each other out on computers, it's all a team effort. We pull each other along.

Focus group two

If you really want it you will come, I don't get anything, not a penny, so I have to work as well, it's only me and my two kids...I think if you want something really strongly for yourself...it's a small place but it has so much to offer...they back you up one hundred percent...me for myself who had no confidence, no self-esteem, I have that now. You do get exhausted and there are days you feel like saying feck it.

I got much more than the academic benefits from here, making new friends, learning that people can and do support each other...staff and fellow students. I pulled out and stayed at home for three or four weeks and said no more I have had enough, I had fallen so far behind...and I met one of the students on the street and they ran after me and said come back to school, come back to school...I said ok and I did and I stuck it out.

The drama class opened me up to new things and I went and joined the local drama group, and it's a social thing for me outside of here and it's a positive, getting out into the community.

Focus group three

There should be more encouragement on the part of staff and more feedback on how you are doing with your assignments so that you can know where you are going right and going wrong. The continuous assessment is great but more feedback would help.

Focus group four

No closing comments.

Chapter Six Data analysis and discussion

Data analysis is an integral part of this overall research process particularly in light of the sequential explanatory mixed methods methodology adopted by this researcher, as analysis occurs at a number of stages throughout this formal research process. Given that multiple approaches to data collection and analysis were employed in a sequence of phases throughout this research process, analysis began before all of the data was collected. Furthermore, the data collection and analysis stages were iterative and recursive and thus non-linear in nature.

According to Pole and Lampard (2002: 190), processual data analysis occurs because the researcher is continuously engaged with the data as it is collected thus shaping research direction. Data analysis is both integral to, and an inevitable aspect of, the entire research process, with a different level or form of analysis necessary at every stage of the research. Opie (2004: xiv) warns that ill-conceived or inappropriate data analysis can render an otherwise sound research project worthless, thus this researcher intends to elaborate further on the theoretical element that is data analysis.

Data analysis is concerned with identifying patterns, implications, consistencies and inconsistencies in the data. Data analysis is subject to the epistemological stance and role of this researcher, as outlined in the *biography of the researcher* in Chapter One, and is influenced by the nature of VTOS as outlined also in Chapter One of this thesis. Analysing data involves critical reflection at various stages in the process and an awareness of bias, which may slant or distort the research. Using a mixed methods approach to data collection and analysis facilitated the addressing of gaps, the development of emerging themes and encouraged constant reflection. One example of this was the decision to hold a one-day workshop for VTOS coordinators to discuss the quantitative findings from the student survey and the coordinators survey. Building on the research strategy discussed in Chapter Four (p.104), Diagram 6.1 demonstrates the exploratory and confirmatory nature of the data analysis.

Exploratory data analysis			Confirmatory data analysis			
Quantitative data collection		Quantitative data analysis	Qualitative data collection		Qualitative data analysis	Analysis of entire data
Start		➡	➡		➡	End
Online survey to coordinators Online survey to students Secondary data collection			One-day coordinator workshop Four student focus groups Observation (Reflective diary)			

Diagram 6.1 Research analysis matrix

This researcher intends to use the definition offered by Onwuegbuzie and Teddlie (2003: 352) where mixed methods data analysis is defined *as the use of quantitative and qualitative analytical techniques, either concurrently or sequentially, at some stage beginning with the data collection process, from which interpretations are made in either a parallel, an integrated, or an iterative manner*. Thus mixed methods data analysis does not depend on the particular research design but rather is concerned with the research question.

Whilst quantity of data is of concern, complexity is another. Trying to organise data, particularly qualitative data, is fraught with tension as there were numerous approaches available to this researcher to organising data, each with its own limitations and validity. Every choice implied an organising framework. Whilst quantitative data benefit from a relatively logical framework with clear alternatives, qualitative data do not. Further tensions arise when seeking to mix both research traditions. The analysis of textual data is more exposed to the subjectivity of the researcher, which may affect the reliability and validity of those data.

It is the view of this researcher that rather than trying to create an absolutely objective researcher, which according to Phillips (1993) is impossible, by transparently stating the theoretical sensitivities of the researcher and the values of the researcher as set out in the researcher's biography in Chapter One, the reader can accept the findings mindful of this researcher's stated position. The following account is presented in a thematic fashion and adopts a mixed methods framework to the analysis.

In light of the tensions just mentioned this researcher adopted Onwuegbuzie and Teddlie’s (2003: 373) *model for the mixed methods data analysis process*, set out in a stage based process and diagrammatically illustrated in Diagram 6.2;

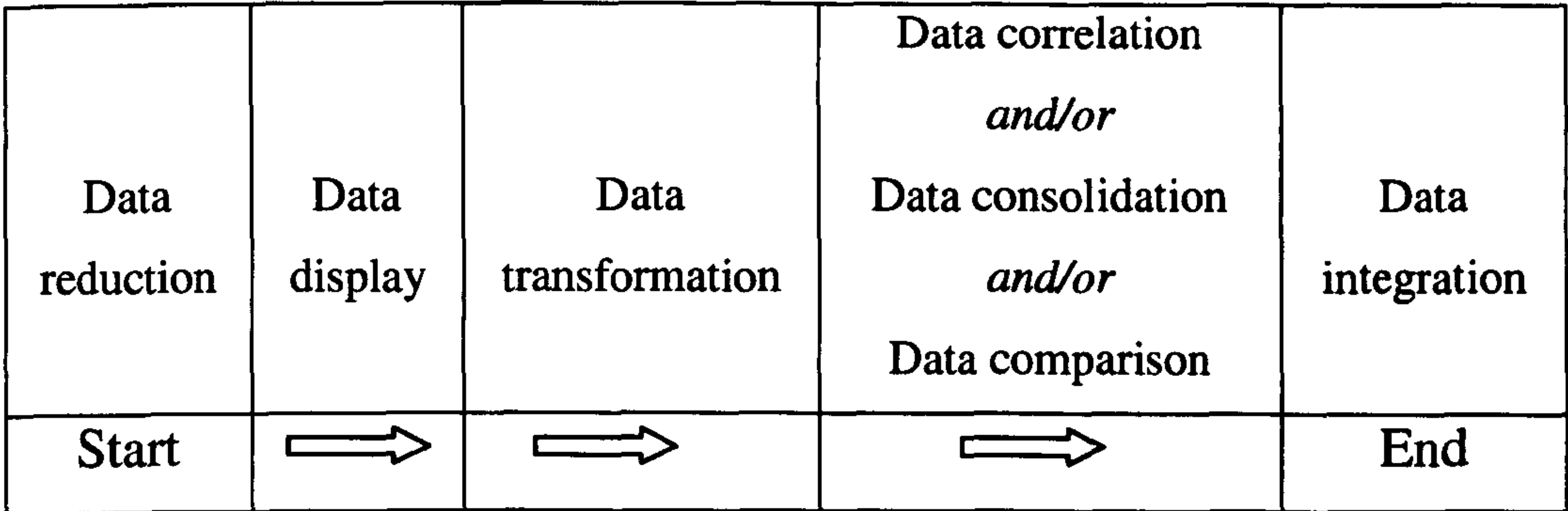


Diagram 6.2 *Mixed methods data analysis process*

Stage one: Data reduction

For the two online quantitative surveys, the *questionpro.com* survey software tools were employed to compute descriptive statistics and to generate statistical summaries. In the qualitative coordinator one-day workshop a *Venn Diagram* approach was employed to reduce data through the central space where discussions on emerging themes were brought to a greater focus and clarity. In the student focus groups, through the application of open-ended questions, verbatim summaries were extracted mindful of the context in which the data occurred.

Stage two: Data display

This researcher chose to display the data in four parts presented in Chapter Five. The two online quantitative surveys are presented in table and diagram summary format with further illustration contained in the appendices. The qualitative workshop presents the consensus data only in Chapter Five with a full account presented in Appendix Eleven. The student focus groups are presented in summary verbatim format with group responses distinguished from individual responses through the use of 'X' followed by the number of participants associated with that response.

Stage three: Data transformation

This process of *qualitizing* and *quantitizing* data types developed emerging themes presented later in this Chapter. This process then led to considering routes which the analysis framework could take, namely; data correlation, data consolidation, data comparison and/or, a combination of these.

Stage four: Data comparison

Here data from the various sources was compared under various themes in a triangulated manner to confirm or offer greater insight into emerging themes.

Stage five: Data integration

This final stage sought to integrate all data into a coherent whole refraining from separating data into quantitative or qualitative sub-sections. This stage ensured that the research questions and the consideration thereof, remained of

greater significance than the methodology and analysis employed. The fruits of this analysis framework are now presented in a thematic fashion.

Shaking off the taboos

The majority of VTOS students described their initial schooling experience as largely positive and for many students in the online survey and focus groups it was a continuation rather than a return to adult education. Thus the emphasis was on VTOS, not as a substitute for inadequate schooling in youth, but more as an educational opportunity superior to that offered in youth. Superior because the VTOS student was motivated not by the artificial incentives of academic organisation, but by a number of factors including the honest desire to learn and to enrich one's experience.

This intrinsic motivation discussed in the literature review emerged repeatedly through this research process, as did positive previous learning experiences which proved a factor in students accessing VTOS and negative previous learning experience proved a significant barrier as evidenced by both the coordinators and the students. One of the top three barriers identified through the coordinator online survey was negative experience of initial schooling and its influence cannot be underestimated.

Adult learners seek out formal learning experiences to cope with specific life change events. In the case of this study, losing a job and learning to live as an

unemployed person is the single most dominant life change event for VTOS students. Yet life is changing socially and economically, we are living longer, have lost the *job for life* mentality and are experiencing many more life events throughout our lives. Even the way we live is being heavily influenced by emerging technologies, most notably with the ever-expanding and influencing Internet phenomenon. Coping with life changing events can manifest itself in the form of stress. Coping with change through engagement in adult education is a motivator in itself as many adults recognise engagement with learning as a means to cope with change events in one's life. Interestingly, this study evidences that adults are motivated to engage in VTOS before, during, or after the change event and this further evidences the idiosyncratic nature of student motives to access VTOS.

This inquiry demonstrates that VTOS students are motivated by a variety of factors, with the strongest motivators including securing employment or further studies. Thus for the vast majority of students the formal learning process is not its own reward, rather it is a means to an end, as opposed to an end in itself. This is an important confirmation for a Government-funded training scheme initiated as a labour-market intervention. VTOS students sought out their training programme simply because they have a use for the knowledge, skills and competencies sought. This finding resonates with Coveys (2004) goal-directed process discussed in the literature review.

Maintaining and increasing one's sense of self-esteem were important motivating factors identified in this inquiry, yet they remained secondary and

inseparable motivators to having a new skill or extending and enhancing current knowledge. VTOS for the vast majority was a means to updating or acquiring job related qualifications and for acquiring current competencies relevant to the workplace, a place which they were currently isolated from. This isolation appears to further strengthen extrinsic motivators such as accreditation leading to increased employment prospects and remuneration.

Blessed art thou among women

VTOS is accessed mainly by females. The majority of students surveyed online and participating in focus groups were female. Table 6.1 demonstrates the national gender picture. Most recent figures demonstrate that male participation is increasing and the likelihood is that male participation on VTOS will increase over the period 2009 to 2013, primarily because the majority of people losing employment during this time are likely to be males.

The feminisation of VTOS extends to coordinators and staff as well as the student profile. As gender has emerged as a key theme, there is a summary quantitative gender analysis of the online student survey in Appendix Nine.

Some interesting gender points to note from the student survey; fifty-one percent of males are single as opposed to thirty-three percent of females. Ten percent of males are over fifty-six years of age as opposed to six percent of

females. Sixty-nine percent of males were unemployed before starting the course as opposed to forty-eight percent of females.

Table 6.1 Gender participation on VTOS			
Year	Female	Male	Total
1995	2106	2031	4137
1996	2259	2123	4382
1997	2377	2030	4407
1998	2344	1943	4287
1999	2707	1873	4580
2000	3356	1818	5174
2001	3519	1786	5305
2002	3719	1724	5443
2003	3821	1880	5701
2004	3881	1758	5639
2005	3810	1728	5538
2006	3652	1732	5384
2007	3636	1741	5377
2008	3616	1787	5403
2009	3537	2031	5568

Source: Compiled figures from National VTOS Office; *VTOS Participants on January 1st*, statistical returns to the Further Education Section of the Department of Education and Science at the 1st of January in each year.

The majority of males lived in the city whilst the majority of females lived in the country. Women overall had a better standard of education on entering VTOS. At the two extremes twenty-four percent of males had only up to Primary level versus sixteen percent of females and at the higher end of the qualification spectrum fourteen percent of females had higher than Leaving Cert. as opposed to nearly nine percent of males. Furthermore seventy-one percent of females stated they are studying at Level Five on the national framework of qualifications (NFQ) as opposed to fifty-seven percent of males.

The majority of students drive to their VTOS centres, with males at thirty-seven percent and females at a much larger majority of sixty-five percent. This difference may be explained in part by the fact that the majority of female students surveyed live in the countryside and are more likely to drop children to school. In terms of initial schooling, overall the response from both genders was positive but at the extremes, nearly thirteen percent of males as opposed to five percent of females found the experience *very bad* and at the opposite end of the spectrum almost twenty percent of females described their initial school experience as *very good* as opposed to just ten percent of males. This finding was further confirmed in the focus groups.

In terms of future outlook, seventy-five percent of females feel they are definitely going to complete the course as opposed to fifty-nine percent of males. The gender results are reversed in the following question which asked would one be likely to participate in further studies in the future with eighty-five percent of males saying yes and a slightly lower eighty-one percent of females saying yes.

Of the ten attitudinal questions asked, only in two of the ten did males score a higher positive response than females, demonstrating that overall females are more positive about their adult-learning experience on VTOS. Of the six finance related questions asked, again in all except the childcare question, men were less satisfied than females.

Whilst the differences in the attitudinal and financial responses on a question-by-question basis are not very different, what is worth noting is the continuous trend of response in these questions. Time after time females are more positive about their learning experiences than males. This was crystallised in each of the focus groups with females far more comfortable in their VTOS surroundings and in their programme compared to males.

Females proved more career-focused than males in the online survey. This reflects the Irish Government's focus during the *Celtic Tiger* era, to mobilise the adult female population into the workforce to meet the labour demands of the rapidly expanding economy of that time. Cross (1981: 24) notes the changing profile of women in America in the 1970s and records the dramatic shift in women's participation in adult education, citing that men learn more often than women because of career changes, with women learning more often because of family. This increase in female participation in adult education continued into the American workplace and as Ireland had attracted much inward investment from American multinational companies, Ireland had catching up to do. As recorded in this end of the *Celtic Tiger* era inquiry, women's relationships with the workplace differed greatly from that experienced at the time of the Tiger's birth, moving from the home place to the workplace.

The feminisation of VTOS was raised at the VTOS coordinators workshop. Comments made included; *young men particularly feel they don't fit in, ...it is much easier for females to access VTOS than males*, and, *...women like to do*

the course while their children are young and they do not want to go into a full-time job. It was accepted by all that VTOS is now gender imbalanced but this was not always the case as evidenced in Table 6.1 (p.186).

Clearly one can see that in the mid-1990s VTOS was largely gender-balanced, but starting in 1997, male participation started to drop and continued to steadily drop for the next ten years where female participation maintained a steady increase leaving a sustained imbalance. One explanation is perhaps during the *Celtic Tiger* era Ireland experienced levels of job creation never seen before. Many of the jobs created required no formal educational qualifications and wage rates seemed to climb each year attracting more and more males in particular.

A second significant factor was a change of policy in respect of eligibility. Up to 1998, VTOS centres had quotas imposed on certain categories of welfare recipients, namely; lone parents, disability allowance and dependent spouses of eligible people. These groupings were limited to ten percent of the overall student number with the majority of students receiving unemployment payments. This quota was removed and whilst still today unemployment payments, now referred to as job seekers payments, make up the majority of applicants to VTOS, the number of lone parent recipients, now referred to as one parent family payments and disability payments have increased beyond the original quotas imposed.

Another possible explanation for the recorded gender imbalance may be found with FÁS where the majority of participants are male. This point was highlighted in the Department of Education and Science (2007:pp.100-114) report on gender in learning, where males have been more attracted towards the practical trades and hands-on orientation of FÁS training programmes as opposed to the more academic orientation of VTOS programmes. A further factor for the increase in VTOS participation by females through the late 1990s may be that the Government was encouraging women to move out of the home and into the paid workforce to satisfy the labour demands of our economy at that time. VTOS served as a bridge for many women giving them the confidence, skills and qualifications to enter paid employment. A further factor was the change in the age profile of VTOS students and this point will be elaborated on in the next thematic section.

During the focus groups distinct differences emerged between the genders, for example, many of the women learned about their VTOS centres from friends and family, whereas men learned about the centres from FÁS and the Department of Social and Family Affairs. Interestingly, no male in the focus groups cited a friend as the way they discovered about VTOS, yet a third of males in the online student survey cited learning of VTOS through a friend. The figure was higher at forty-four percent for females.

In this researcher's observation, women in the focus groups appeared much more comfortable to participate, with males being that bit more reserved. Before starting the course many of the females were at home minding children

and were bored. The majority of men, on the other hand, were either working or doing part-time courses before coming on to VTOS. In the vast majority of instances males in the focus groups were occupied outside the home prior to starting their VTOS courses.

VTOS was a return to adult education for the vast majority of females as opposed to a continuation in adult education, whereas for males the response was far more evenly split. In this researcher's observation, males, like females, experience a great deal of fear on entering VTOS. However, females appear better able to find comfort and support in their new learning environment, whilst the males, even after taking the decision to enrol, are far more likely to drop out than females. When these males are asked why they are not going ahead with their courses, many offer vague excuses and some say they are not going in with *all those women*. One male, who was the only male in a class of sixteen students, commented, *blessed art thou among women*.

These findings concur with the Department of Education and Science (2007: 114) study on gender in the Further Education area, where it concludes that females displayed a much greater and more sustained appetite for education than men across a variety of Further Education programmes.

Future indications are that gender imbalance will shift towards a more gender-balanced student profile as unemployment figures rise, particularly given that a higher percentage of males are becoming unemployed.

You are never too old

Another emerging trend over the past decade of VTOS is the age profile of VTOS students, as demonstrated in Table 6.2. Clearly the age profile of VTOS is shifting towards the more mature learner. Females over forty have increased four fold with males over forty doubling, whereas both genders under twenty-five have been in steady decline. The student survey demonstrated the range of ages participating, with only the over fifty-six age category identifiable as a significant minority.

Table 6.2 Age and gender participation on VTOS							
Gender	F:	M:	F:	M:	F:	M:	
Age	21-24	21-24	25-39	25-39	40+	40+	Total
1995	849	754	973	962	284	315	4137
1996	864	821	991	938	404	364	4382
1997	862	665	1051	1000	472	357	4407
1998	706	550	1145	1018	490	378	4287
1999	742	481	1234	960	727	436	4580
2000	757	406	1567	876	1040	528	5174
2001	670	284	1653	841	1196	661	5305
2002	637	300	1783	712	1300	711	5443
2003	709	304	1775	792	1337	784	5701
2004	688	296	1795	786	1398	676	5639
2005	646	307	1781	756	1383	665	5538
2006	582	285	1755	815	1315	632	5384
2007	595	277	1757	852	1284	612	5377
2008	537	261	1748	821	1331	705	5403
2009	497	292	1722	904	1316	837	5568
Change 1995- 2009	(352)	(462)	749	(58)	1032	522	1431

Source: Compiled figures from National VTOS Office; *VTOS Participants on January 1st*, statistical returns to the Further Education Section of the Department of Education and Science at the 1st of January in each year.

In the online survey, students were asked if they felt *being too old* was a barrier to returning to adult education; sixty-one percent said *not at all*, with only four percent of students saying it was a *significant barrier*. In the VTOS coordinators' online survey, coordinators felt *feeling too old* was a bigger barrier for males (mean 3.52 out of 5.00) than females (mean 3.19 out of 5.00) but overall, age as a barrier was rated as a *medium* barrier. At the VTOS coordinators' workshop, *fear of being too old* was cited as a barrier. Further comments offered included; the *age barrier* and *too old to learn something new* as a barrier. At the student focus groups, *being too old* was dismissed by all participants as not an issue at all.

The changing trends towards a more mature profile is proof, if it were needed, that *being too old* is becoming less of a barrier as more adults embrace the concept of lifelong learning. Interestingly, of those students between forty-five and fifty-five surveyed online, most felt that their *being too old* was a barrier to participation. Yet for those between fifty-five and sixty-five, feeling too old was of less concern.

Further findings relevant to ageism

In the student survey, twenty-one to thirty year old students were most motivated by qualifications leading to further studies. This group felt strongest that returning to adult education left them financially worse off (*whilst doing the course*). They are most likely to walk or use public transport to get to their course and are the group most informed by friends or neighbours about

VTOS. For the majority of this group, VTOS was a continuation of lifelong learning rather than a return, where the opposite is true for all other age categories. This group too felt most confident about successfully completing their VTOS programme. Those aged thirty to forty-four were most motivated by qualifications leading to a job and had the greatest family commitments.

Those aged between forty-five and fifty-five were the age band most interested in improving their self-confidence, were the most likely to drive to their course and were the group which found a lack of information and loss of income as being significant barriers to their participation as well as a negative experience of their initial schooling and pressure on their personal finances. This group was the dominant age group when it came to considering other learning options prior to commencing VTOS.

For the majority of those over fifty-five, VTOS was a return to lifelong learning rather than a continuation where the focus is not on further education or employment but improving one's overall level of education. This group appears to have the fewest barriers to accessing VTOS, yet this inquiry discovered that it is the minority age group participating on VTOS.

Ah sure the building's grand

The physical buildings from which VTOS operates nationally vary greatly. Unfortunately the majority of VTOS centres visited operate from old technical

or religious schools which were vacated by Second-level mainstream students requiring more modern facilities. In this researcher's observation, every centre visited was warm, welcoming and well-maintained, where coordinators were making the best of what they had. Other VTOS premises visited were very modern and demonstrated an ideal physical environment for adult-learning. In the coordinator online survey, twenty-two percent of premises were used for VTOS exclusively and in forty percent of VTOS premises a number of adult education initiatives took place. The coordinator workshop highlighted the benefits of an exclusively adult environment and ethos.

There was quite an even split between VTOS premises being owned or rented with the slight majority of premises owned. Whilst a slight majority of coordinators in the online survey stated their building was suitable for their needs, this point emerged in the coordinator workshop with many agreeing that programmes have to be designed and indeed evolve around the limitations of the physical premises. Thus it was felt that in reality a greater number of premises failed to meet local adult education demands. Further related points were raised; location of the centre (on the outskirts of a town), difficulty of access, lack of resources for physical structures and lack of space.

It should be noted that the vast majority of student respondents, some eighty-two percent, to the online survey described their centre as adult education exclusive. Table 6.3 shows an overall favourable response in the online student survey to the premises from which VTOS operates. Yet the association, with many of the centres located in former Primary and

Secondary schools, is an added obstacle to many people considering returning to adult education, as was evidenced from the focus groups where many spoke of their anxiety at going *back into the old tech*.

Table 6.3 Satisfaction rates at VTOS premises				
<i>Expressed as percentages</i>	Most unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Satisfactory	Very satisfactory
Location of your centre	6.24	7.21	46.00	40.55
Appearance of your centre	6.46	9.59	56.75	27.20
The centre atmosphere	4.92	4.13	45.67	45.28

Source: Online student survey

Adult motives to access VTOS

When the students were asked in the online survey to rate their level of motivation under a series of headings, the following three emerged as the most motivating in order of importance:

- For Females;

1.

A qualification leading to a job.

2.

Improve one’s overall standard of education.

3.

To achieve a personal ambition.
- For Males;

1.

Improve one’s overall standard of education.

2.

To achieve a personal ambition.

3.

A qualification leading to a job.

When the coordinators were asked the same question in their online survey, the following results emerged in order of importance:

- For Females;

1.

A qualification leading to a job.

2.

Improve one’s overall standard of education.

3.

To boost self-confidence / self-esteem.
- For Males;

1.

A qualification leading to a job.

2.

Qualification leading to further studies.

3.

Improve one’s overall standard of education.

A more complete account of motivating factors cited by both the coordinators and the students is graphically presented in Diagram 6.3.

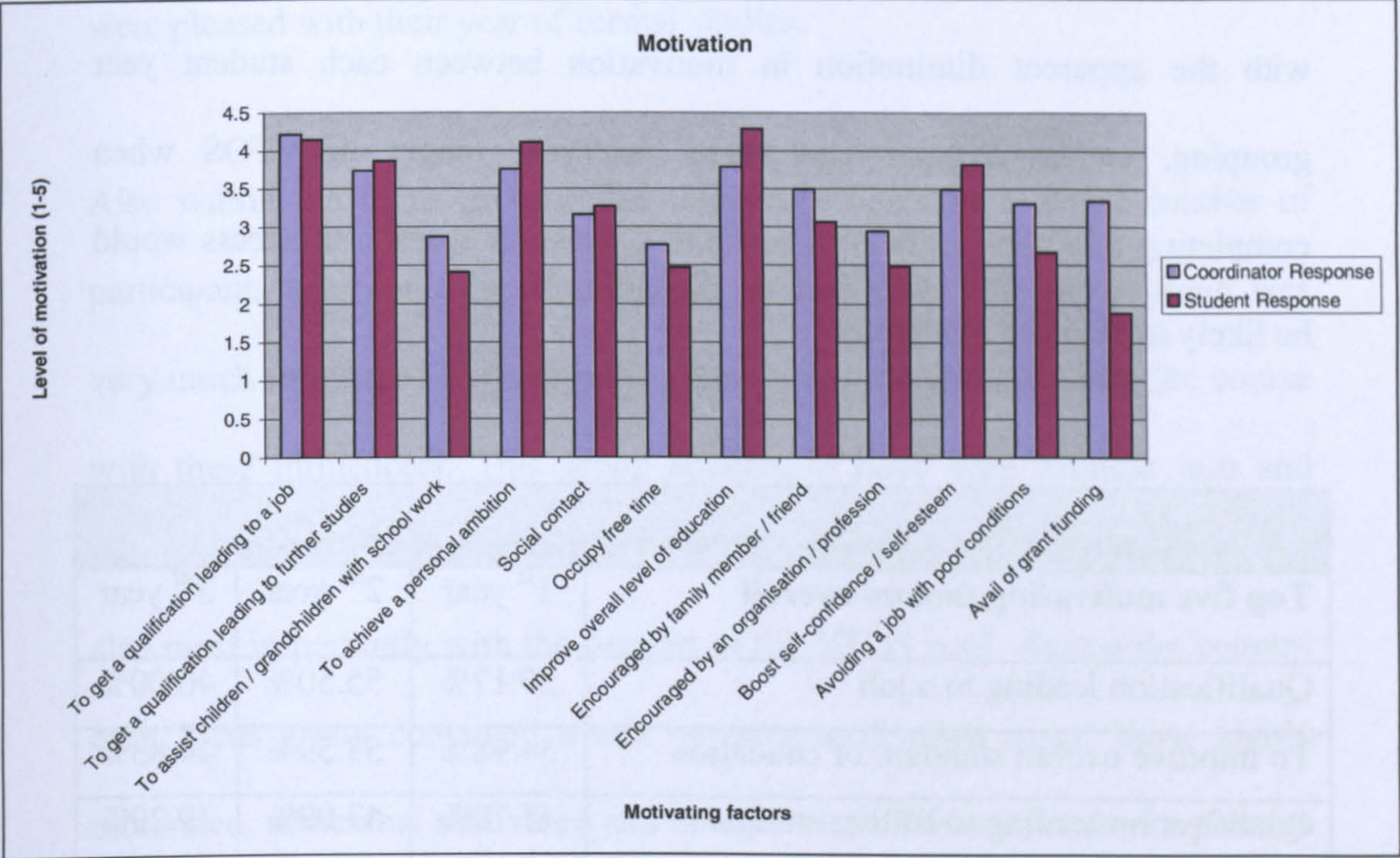


Diagram 6.3 Motivating factors

In the student survey, family status played a discrete, but interesting part in motive declaration, with those adults divorced or separated declaring

significantly higher motives across a range of motivation questions than other groupings. There was little difference between any other family groupings.

Again in the online survey, students who were in the first year of their programme appeared the most highly motivated group towards joining VTOS. Table 6.4 presents the students’ responses where they chose the *highest motivating factor* option. First-year and Second-year groupings are most motivated by qualifications leading to employment and Third-years are most motivated by achieving a personal ambition. This researcher was concerned with the apparent diminution in motivation between each student year grouping, yet as Second-years were one year longer in VTOS when completing this survey, their response to a question specific to access would be likely to be more moderate.

Table 6.4 Student year survey comparison of motivation			
Top five motivating factors overall	1 st year	2 nd year	3 rd year
Qualification leading to a job	59.17%	55.50%	40.00%
To improve overall standard of education	54.98%	53.59%	44.83%
Qualification leading to further studies	45.70%	43.00%	39.29%
To boost self-confidence / esteem	35.07%	36.06%	40.62%
To achieve a personal ambition	47.60%	46.86%	60.71%

VTOS coordinators were collectively of the view at the workshop session that personal ambition intrinsic to the student is the strongest motivator towards

accessing VTOS and is the motivator which would most successfully bring the adult student through formal VTOS studies.

In the focus groups there were clear examples of adult students with personal ambition and this is repeatedly evidenced through part four of Chapter Five. Yet the focus groups presented at least as many adults who appeared, even after probing, to display moderate personal drive or ambition, at least towards education. Yet all those who participated in the focus groups were at the end of their academic year and whilst the issue of course results or success was not directly discussed, it appeared all those who participated in the focus groups were pleased with their year of formal studies.

Also within the focus groups, this researcher observed a small number of participants who could be described as unmotivated. This small group was very much influenced by family members or friends, often starting the course with these influencers. This group appears to have been brought into and through their VTOS course with the influence of their family and friends and also most importantly with the support of the VTOS staff. Across the country each focus group contained a mix of three motivation types; those highly motivated, somewhat motivated and unmotivated. This mix created a positive environment in which to conduct the focus groups and this researcher would suggest that this mix would create rich learning environments for the students.

The focus groups highlighted the motivation of necessity, a point discussed in the literature review particularly by Maslow (1943), where adults were clear

about what was lacking from their skill set or what was required to realise an achievable ambition. These proved to be needs more than wants for these adults. To get specific qualifications to enhance work experience, to master the Internet, to change career, to cope and adapt with life-change events, many examples emerged from all parts of the country and VTOS, for these adults, was the vehicle through which these goals could be achieved. Other participants were less clear about their motivation to access and participate, yet were sure of the positive benefits to their lives. Overcoming fears, fulfilling a lifetime ambition, learning for learning's sake and avoiding boredom were some of the goals which emerged and were realised by the participants.

Illeris (2003a) in the literature review spoke of Danish adults' sense of more or less being forced into adult education. This researcher found during this inquiry that this experience was not replicated on VTOS. Within the coordinators' workshop, reference was made to pressure from statutory agencies on adults to apply for VTOS. Yet this comment was made by a minority of coordinators and they accepted this only occurred in a minority of cases. Current Government policy is moving towards greater encouragement of lifelong learning. One example of this was an announcement in 2009 that if young adults wished to retain their maximum social welfare entitlement, they would have to enter formal adult education and training programmes. Thus this issue of compulsory adult education, if only compulsory by necessity, is an issue worthy of monitoring in the years ahead.

VTOS access obstacles

Many of the obstacles encountered by potential VTOS students are contained in Diagram 6.4. This diagram captures in summary form the coordinator opinions and the student opinions through the online surveys conducted and it proved controversial. The findings from the students cannot be said to be reflective of potential students as the responses were completed by those who successfully entered VTOS and were obviously still on their course at the time of the survey. Thus the disparity between student and coordinator response is accounted for by the type of student who completed the survey.

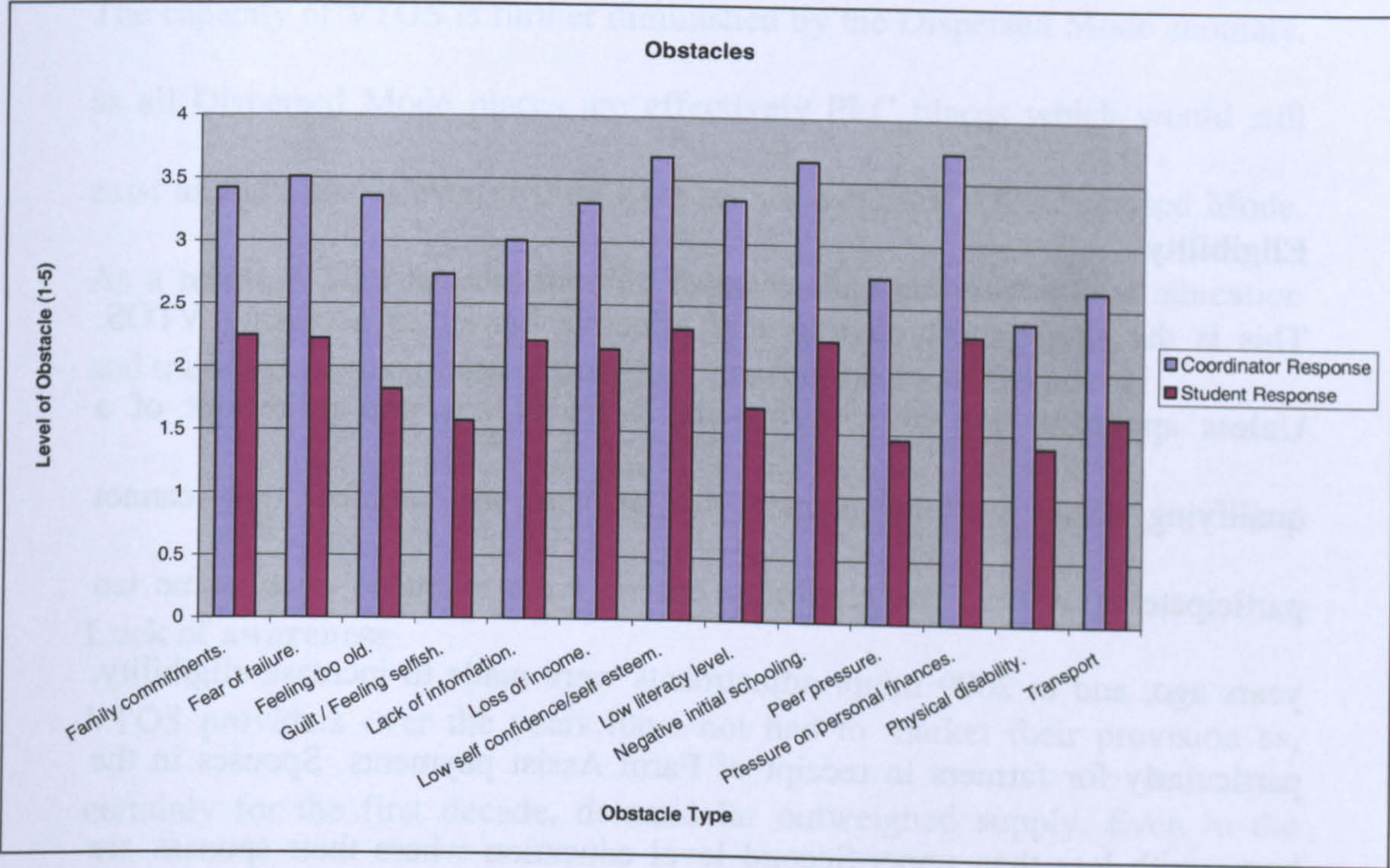


Diagram 6.4 Obstacles to accessing VTOS

Despite the perceived low level of obstacles experienced by the students surveyed, the variation between obstacle perceptions is worthy of note. Interesting too is the consistent pattern between the coordinator and student opinions, accepting the variation is largely accounted for by the profile of student completing the survey. From this quantitative analysis it is clear that both coordinator and student agree that the greatest three obstacles are firstly, low self-confidence or self-esteem, secondly, pressure on personal finances and thirdly, negative experience of initial schooling. The emergent barriers are largely barriers of perception. Fear of failure was just outside the top three barriers and there appears to be clear agreement between the coordinators and the students around these core obstacles.

Eligibility

This is the single most obvious and effective barrier to accessing VTOS. Unless applicants are over twenty-one years of age and in receipt of a qualifying social welfare payment for at least six months, they cannot participate in VTOS. The eligibility criteria were extended once, some ten years ago, and in 2009 minor adjustments were made to increase eligibility, particularly for farmers in receipt of Farm Assist payments. Spouses in the home with less than upper-Second level education where their spouses are working are completely excluded. This obstacle is relatively easy to remove as a political headline exercise but would be meaningless unless the capacity of VTOS were increased accordingly. Thus eligibility must be considered in tandem with capacity.

Capacity

Another barrier is the national cap on VTOS numbers where no more than approximately five thousand people are permitted to participate in VTOS. This cap has remained at this level for many years at a time when other adult education initiatives have dramatically increased. For example, according to Watson *et al.* (2006: 9) Post Leaving Certificate students over twenty-three years of age have increased by over fifteen thousand in the period 2001 to 2006 doubling PLC provision to over thirty thousand places per annum. The principal training agency in Ireland, FÁS (2007: 3), in its Annual Report notes that approximately forty thousand people participate in its training programmes, leaving VTOS lacking any meaningful capacity.

The capacity of VTOS is further diminished by the Dispersed Mode anomaly, as all Dispersed Mode places are effectively PLC places which would still exist as PLC places even if they were withdrawn as VTOS Dispersed Mode. As a result, VTOS has the funding capacity nationally to deliver education and training to a maximum of only four thousand core VTOS adults.

Lack of awareness

VTOS providers over the years have not had to market their provision as, certainly for the first decade, demand far outweighed supply. Even in the second decade of VTOS, local providers were focused in their recruitment strategies, meaning that for the vast majority of adults in Ireland they simply would not know what VTOS meant or its function. Owing to the small scale

of the scheme and its lack of a national profile, it has remained something of an unknown for most and regrettably this lack of awareness emerged clearly through the quantitative and qualitative strands of this inquiry. This barrier is a concern too for national VEC structures which support many adult initiatives including VTOS, where to the wider public they remain perceived as exclusively Second-level vocational schooling providers.

VTOS image

This point presented mixed data in that many students felt that there is less stigma in being an adult full-time student than being unemployed. Others, however, commented that because of the eligibility criteria exclusively for those in receipt of social welfare payments, VTOS creates a stigma which puts others off attending, citing the fact that they feel labelled and are uncomfortable with the VTOS label.

Age and Health

Whilst attitudes to lifelong learning are improving as evidenced by our maturing profile on VTOS, many still feel they are too old to participate in a training or education programme. Health too, is a barrier as many VTOS-eligible persons are in receipt of disability payments.

Fear

Fear is a significant and often underestimated barrier to accessing VTOS. Many coordinators commented that the most difficult part of the course for students is arriving on the first day to enrol. This finding which was discussed in the literature review is often underestimated. The size of class groups can also be a barrier with many adults uncomfortable in large class groups at the start of the course and some choose to leave as a result. In the focus groups it was felt that fear as a barrier affects all age groups. Most agreement was reached on the hypothesis that the most mature grouping, those who are the longest out of formal mainstream education, doubted their ability and had the greatest fear of participation.

Funding

Pressure on personal finances was recognised by both the coordinators and the students as a significant obstacle to participation. As one student commented, *it's about the money*. Funding support and incentive disparities were cited as a barrier both within and outside VTOS, with many students choosing the learning programme with the greatest financial incentives, rather than the learning programme which best meets their learning needs.

Also, a lack of political will to address the financial supports for VTOS students is an obstacle. Childcare rates, meal and travel allowance rates and financial assistance with the costs of returning to education prove insufficient for many wishing to return to education. Coffield (1999), in an analysis of

adult education in the U.K., speaks of the indefensible differential in the funding of part-time and full-time students and believes that a learning society needs to be underpinned by multiple learning opportunities at every stage and at every level of achievement.

Course length, time and range

The length of the VTOS training year is ten weeks longer than the mainstream Second-level year, six weeks longer than the Primary school year and fourteen weeks longer than the standard Third-level year. This is a significant barrier for some VTOS parents, where they need to be off when children are off school. The length of the VTOS day, which varies between centres but is typically from 9am to 4pm, creates an obstacle for those who have to maintain a busy household on top of trying to keep up with the classes and find time for study in the evening. Family responsibilities, particularly childcare and eldercare, ensure participation on VTOS for many is impossible at that stage in their lives. Course range emerged as a barrier as the majority of VTOS centres are relatively small and thus the programme range is limited.

Gender imbalance

The feminisation of VTOS has created a barrier for some males and many coordinators noted the frustration experienced by some males on VTOS who were trying to *fit in* to their new learning environments. In a limited number of cases aggressive tendencies were noted, with males feeling they didn't belong.

Some male attitudes towards learning were identified through the focus groups as a dispositional barrier, in that unless education or training was linked to work or remuneration, then it was not for males.

Gender imbalance has reduced in 2009 with local evidence of a significant increase in male applicants for VTOS. Given that the majority of those who have lost their employment in recent times are males, it is likely that male participation on VTOS will increase further to create a more gender-balanced VTOS enrolment, at least in the short-term.

Lack of local integration

A lack of a local integration strategy between State agencies and even within State agencies was raised as a further barrier to assisting potential learners access VTOS at a local level, particularly around awareness raising. Given the importance of social networks as discussed by Heath *et al.* (2008) in Chapter Two there is a need for local highly visible seamless adult education services to meet the adult education needs for a given locality.

Lack of social power

Lack of social power and agency emerged as an obstacle as natural behaviours are suppressed where self-confidence and self-belief are low. Simply put, the greater the social power one has, the greater the choice. This point is somewhat complicated by the fact that adult learners can have great

confidence, for example operating a forklift, but because of a low standard of education may feel they have no social power towards accessing education. This point is further influenced by the quality of personal relationships within one's social groups as discussed by Heath *et al.* in Chapter Two. One's social network can prove most influential in encouraging or discouraging an adult to consider returning to formal education. It is noted that often red tape or lengthy application processes can be intimidating to potential students, yet the application process for VTOS students is personal and welcoming and involves minimum paperwork for the majority of applicants. This point is further evidenced by the greatest barriers identified in the large-scale surveys where both coordinator and student recognised low self-esteem, low self-confidence, fear and negative initial school experiences as the most significant obstacles.

This analysis and discussion chapter was informed by the collective mixed findings of this research process and served to illuminate the research questions posited at the outset of Chapter One. Arising from this analysis and discussion, this thesis now draws towards a close with the final chapter dedicated to concluding comments and recommendations offered in an integrated fashion.

Chapter Seven Conclusions and Recommendations

This thesis set out to uncover adult student motives to return to formal adult-learning and to better understand the obstacles encountered by such adults. Applying Maslow's *Hierarchy of Needs* (1943), this researcher believes that adults frequent the businesses that satisfy their needs. The same is true of adult education provision. By responding to the needs, interests and real life challenges faced by adult learners, the provision of VTOS can flourish. Adult needs must be situated within their realities, including; their wealth of experiences, their social networks, their doubts of their learning abilities, their time limitations and their clarity of purpose or focus.

A key and consistent finding of this research is that VTOS students are motivated by the prospect of employment and the prospect of further studies leading to employment, which for the majority justifies their endeavours. This research was conducted at a time when employment opportunities were many and progression study opportunities were expanding at PLC level and at Third-level. The employment landscape has changed dramatically, particularly over the period from 2008 to mid-2009 as illustrated in Chapter One. The education and training landscape has expanded marginally during this same time-frame, with small increases in PLC and at Third-level, particularly in the Institutes of Technology. However, the increased demand

for education and training, as a direct consequence of the changing employment landscape, leaves this expansion insufficient.

Adult learners are truly idiosyncratic, as evidenced throughout this research. One of the wonderful aspects of adult education is continuously responding to each particular group of adult learners to facilitate their own learning. What these VTOS students learn are the generic and soft skills which according to the National Competitiveness Council (NCC) 2009 are fundamental to our economic future and to our society's prosperity. The NCC (2009: 15) describe these skills as including; self-directed learning, communication skills, critical thinking, team working and influencing skills. VTOS has a key responsibility in this regard, through the programmes identified in this research. This research evidences the development of many of these skills and highlights the need to further develop the self-confidence and self-belief in adult students, a prerequisite to acquiring such skills.

Three other broad skills sets identified by the NCC (2009) are: Information and Communications Technology, Language Skills and finally, Mathematics, Science and Engineering Skills. VTOS is best placed to deliver on many of these skills at the most important level, that is, the basic. With the shelf life of specialist skills reducing, a concentration on basic skills to facilitate self-directed learning makes economic sense and positive societal sense, creating a more inclusive society and a smarter and more flexible economic workforce.

Throughout this research study, VTOS students were keen to participate in this research and make known their views. Yet just fifty percent of centres surveyed had student councils. Student participation in programme review and programme planning would increase student engagement, better address local learner needs and generate an even more positive word of mouth. This researcher recommends the establishment of such local student councils.

Word of mouth proved to be the most effective informant about VTOS to potential students. One of the greatest obstacles to participation in adult education evidenced through this research is a lack of awareness of availability. The target audience for VTOS is those most marginalised in our society. Concentrating on building a culture of lifelong learning through the positive learning experiences of VTOS students creates ambassadors for lifelong learning. Family members, friends and neighbours witness the positive and often life changing experience which adult education can offer. It reduces doubt and fear and encourages their own participation in education.

This researcher recommends the promotion of *ambassador students* throughout all VTOS centres. This concept encourages all participating students to consider sharing their formal education experience with their local communities. Furthermore, it is about empowering a select few students to promote adult education now and in the years ahead.

The National Competitiveness Council's *Statement on Education and Training* (2009: 34) calls for a Government-wide cohesion in the provision of

Further Education and training courses. VTOS is but one element of a multi-element provision by the State in the area of Further Education, with each provider operating within its own terms and conditions. Even within VTOS, the VEC Support Services Unit (*Internal Audit Unit*) evidenced *administrative drift* over time. This researcher welcomed the national review of procedures within VTOS by this internal audit body, completed in 2008.

A more responsive and equitable Further Education national provision could be achieved through greater integration between schemes and greater coordination at local delivery level. Formal learning schemes such as Youthreach, STTC, BTEI, PLC, Community Education, Adult Literacy, Adult Guidance Initiatives and VTOS all operate under the governance of the national VEC structure. Other significant schemes include: FÁS, BTEA, Teagasc, Health Service Executive programmes, Third-level access programmes, private providers and community and voluntary group providers. Such schemes need to coordinate locally to ensure widening participation, fluid progression options, efficiency of provision and reduced duplication.

This local integration could be achieved through the establishment of *Local Adult Learning Boards*. This recommendation originated in Murphy's (1973: 76) report to the Minister of Education, where promotion of local adult education associations was recommended. Kenny's (1983: 129) report to the Minister of Education further clarified this recommendation and offered a structure, function and terms of reference for Adult Education Boards to serve the needs of local areas.

The Government's own Department of Education and Science (2000: 192) *Learning for Life: White Paper on Adult Education* recommended the establishment of Local Adult Learning Boards to address the fragmentation of current adult education, particularly in the area of Further Education. To date such boards have not materialised. This researcher again would recommend that interested parties work towards the establishment of Local Adult Learning Boards, as envisaged in the White Paper (2000).

Nationally there is a need for a capital budget for the Further Education Section within the Department of Education and Science to: ensure a shared view of future skills training and education; put the necessary infrastructure in place to deliver those skills and; coordinate a national advertising and promotion campaign to embed a culture of lifelong learning for everyone. Further Education continues to operate largely within an education system created and developed to meet the needs of young people and requires a greater shift from that inadequate model towards a lifelong learning system.

Primarily VTOS delivers training, education and skills, with accreditation evidencing that process. When VTOS was established some twenty years ago, it was recognised that a meaningful full-time training response was required to address a long-term unemployment issue at that time. There remains a need for more than a ten-week course for many of the 100,000 plus workers who lost their employment in 2009 alone. The NCC (2009: 34) cite that thirty-four percent of the working age population have no more than Junior Certificate (lower Second-level) education. Indeed within VTOS, there has been a

constant demand for full-time education and training to equip adults with the skills, confidence and qualifications to participate more fully in the workplace and in society, even at times of full employment.

Many of the most marginalised in our society were brought in from the fringes through VTOS during the years of full employment, yet now in 2009 with scarce VTOS places being far less than current demand, many marginalised adults are destined to remain there for the next number of years as those more informed and able compete for limited places. With 2010 designated as the *European Year of Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion*, VTOS is ideally situated to address this challenge nationwide if VTOS places are increased meaningfully.

Further Education equivalent programmes such as PLC have seen their numbers more than double since 2001 from 15,000 to over 30,000, (Source, Watson *et al.* 2006: 9). This researcher recommends a doubling of VTOS numbers to 10,000 core VTOS places to meet current challenges. This lifting of the national cap on VTOS would facilitate a greater proportion of adults to more actively participate in a culture of lifelong learning.

Furthermore this expansion of places should incorporate a concentration at FETAC Levels Three and Four on the National Framework of Qualifications, (*diagrammatically illustrated in Diagram 1.3, p. 27, Chapter One*) as well as continuing to offer programmes at Level Five. Consideration too must be given to FETAC Levels One and Two and where appropriate, these relatively

new levels should be considered within VTOS, to ensure a range of learning opportunities tailored to the needs of each local adult population.

The labour force in 2009 has doubled since the introduction of VTOS in 1989. There are greater numbers unemployed in 2009 than when the dire need for VTOS was realised twenty years ago. Furthermore our local, European and global economies are very different to those of twenty years ago in relation to knowledge, learning, communication and technology.

These factors alone justify on economic grounds, the national need for more full-time education and training. An increase in VTOS places would have added benefits in meeting the societal need of encouraging more citizens to improve their education and well-being. Education can serve as a preventative measure against antisocial activities and can break intergenerational family cycles of disadvantage and social exclusion as witnessed by this researcher over a number of years.

In order for adults to be motivated to access a VTOS programme, it must first be accessible. Thus certain obstacles to accessing VTOS must be addressed. This research discovered that the greatest obstacles to participation on VTOS are; eligibility, the cap on VTOS places and a lack of awareness. Adults who have not yet attained upper Second-level education (or Leaving Certificate) should be entitled to participate on VTOS. At present, spouses in the home, where a partner is working and certain part-time and migrant workers, are excluded from participating in VTOS. Throughout this research, both

coordinators and students felt this situation was grossly unfair. The eligibility criteria for VTOS should be reviewed in order to remove current discriminations and this review should take place in tandem with a review of capacity.

Another significant finding was the lack of awareness of VTOS and its various programmes. This is a challenging obstacle to overcome as VTOS programmes vary from one region to the next. One recommendation would be to organise local cluster training for all staff of related Government services, such as the Department of Social and Family Affairs, the Health Service Executive and FÁS, as well as other local interests to create a more integrated local response to local needs. The establishment of *Local Adult Learning Boards* as recommended earlier would also significantly address this obstacle.

The obstacles discussed thus far remain outside the adult learner. This research discovered that the greatest obstacle located within the VTOS learner is the fear and anxiety of taking the step to return to adult education. The most effective means of neutralising this very real obstacle is through promoting *ambassador students*, as mentioned previously, where the positive witness of student experience reduces the fear and encourages others through word of mouth to consider active participation in lifelong learning.

The Further Education arena is sprinkled with student grant options, bonus options and expenses claims, the breadth and variation of which are unjust and unfair. Consistently it emerged that monies were not a motivator for

participation on VTOS, yet this research discovered that amongst the males particularly it did give a sense of added purpose to participating on VTOS.

Whilst some incentives within Further Education are generous, in the opinion of this researcher, student allowances within VTOS are paltry, for example, a meal allowance of €4.00 per week. This researcher felt an undercurrent of resentment from students encountered at a number of VTOS centres, during the data collection phase of this research, towards the variation in student incentive payments, internal and external to VTOS. Differences of grant incentives between training scheme options can extend to thousands of euro per annum and this can be an unintended demotivator for many adult students. This researcher recommends a review of all student grants across all areas of Further and Higher Education, towards the creation of a standard scheme with pro-rata payments applied to this harmonised scheme.

This research thesis crystallised two major trends in Ireland today; the ageing profile of lifelong learning on VTOS and labour transitions throughout the lifetime of the individual. We have a greater life expectancy and whilst our economic workforce remains one of the youngest in Europe, our workforce is maturing. This coupled with the disappearance of the *job for life* requires lifelong learning to be more meaningful. The question is, has the Government, the employers, the employees and society yet recognised that lifelong learning is a lifelong investment by all parties towards a better future, both for the economy and society?

Further Education requires increased investment. The Government has an opportunity in these challenging times to improve the skills of a great number of people, in order to facilitate greater participation in a global economic recovery when it occurs. Yet at a time of limited public monies and greater public demands, tough choices arise. One must question if the Government is willing to invest now for future prosperity, not prosperity for the few but prosperity for the many? The alternative of not investing makes it increasingly likely that this current recession will be remembered for condemning many to long-term unemployment. These hard choices were articulated in July 2009 in the McCarthy Report (2009) at a time when the State was borrowing €65 million per day to fund the day to day running of the country.

Unemployment is a personal tragedy and everyone in Ireland is now touched by it in some form. The negative effects for the person who has lost his or her job cannot be underestimated and can scar for many years particularly after the prosperity of the *Celtic Tiger* era. A loss of income, increasing debts, physical and mental illness can result from unemployment. Having reviewed much research in the UK on unemployment and its implications, Field (2009: 17) highlights that education and qualifications do matter for people who are unemployed and pay off, not just in the short-term, but through the life course.

Throughout this research, students witnessed and evidenced learning as a driver of living and of discovering and rediscovering oneself. It is a stimulus enriching our lives. VTOS students operate in progressive environments where the focus is on engagement and effort towards acquiring and improving

skills, competence and knowledge. This research has discovered that the strongest motive to access VTOS proved to be acquiring the knowledge and skills to access further studies and access employment, which in itself would provide new learning opportunities. VTOS bridges that knowledge and skills gap for many thousands of adults nationally and, more importantly, instils self-belief and confidence in students to cross that bridge.

Future research directions

The data collection phase of this research process was conducted over a twenty-month period up to June 2008, at the peak of an economic wave in Ireland. Now, some sixteen months later in 2009, a great deal has changed. The greatest change for VTOS students is the changed labour-market situation and this researcher believes this research inquiry could be repeated to uncover changes in attitudes (*if any*) of students and coordinators and to compare the results in what will have been two significantly different economic climates.

There remains great scope to better understand VTOS students. Downes and Keogh (1998) produced a rich qualitative account of VTOS student's stories and now more than a decade later a similar research initiative would be a most valuable addition to the existing literature on VTOS.

This researcher believes that obstacles to participation on VTOS and other adult education programmes warrant further investigation amongst those outside a particular programme. A valuable piece of research could be

produced by engaging with those who sought to access formal adult education, yet remain outside of formal education.

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(vi) Appendices

1. Survey e-mail invitation to VTOS coordinators (October 2006)
 2. Coordinator online survey questions, presented in Microsoft Word.
 3. Summary statistical results from the coordinators survey extracted from *questionpro.com*.
 4. Request letter to VTOS coordinators to facilitate the distribution and completion of VTOS student survey.
 5. Instruction manual to VTOS coordinators or nominated staff member for the facilitation of the online student survey.
 - 6 Letter to VTOS students informing them of the survey and inviting their participation.
 - 7 Student online survey questions, presented in Microsoft Word (November 2007).
 8. Summary statistical results from the student's survey extracted from *questionpro.com*.
 9. Summary gender analysis from the online student's survey.
 10. Letter of invitation to coordinators (distributed through the secretary of the National Association of VTOS Coordinators by e-mail) to a one-day workshop specific to this research topic. (April 2008).
 11. Recorded findings from coordinators one-day workshop (May 2008).
 12. Letter of invitation to students to participate in a focus group session. (May & June 2008.)
 13. Consent forms completed by focus group participants.
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14. Focus group student question schedule.
15. Venn Diagram group-work approach.

Appendix One***Coordinator survey invitation***

Subject: F.A.O. VTOS Coordinator - Survey Invitation

Date: 10/10/2006.

Dear Colleague,

I hope the September challenge of timetables, setting up new students, paperwork and VTOS queries is starting to ease and that your new academic year is well up and running. I deliberately opted to leave this matter until now as I am sure you had more than enough on your plate getting the new year started.

You are one of just over 100 VTOS coordinators nationally. I am looking for ten minutes of your time to complete a secure, strictly confidential and online questionnaire relevant to VTOS. The focus of this research is around studying the motivating factors and obstacles encountered by adults in returning to second chance education. Already expressions of interest have been received in publishing part or all of the research findings and this research can only be successful with your assistance.

This questionnaire forms an initial study to better focus what will be a major study at doctorate level next year which hopes to seek responses from the students themselves. Your responses will help focus and shape the direction of this overall study. Only results in the aggregate will be reported.

This research has been approved from an ethical perspective and has been piloted on three VTOS coordinators. This research has the support of David Leahy, CEO, Tipperary NR VEC, Helen Keogh, VTOS National Coordinator and Carmel Sheridan, Chairperson, National Association of VTOS Coordinators.

By supporting this research you are sending a clear signal to the reports audience that VTOS coordinators are committed to better understanding our learners, to increasing the learning opportunities for our adults and are committed to improving the conditions for our local adult learners.

This online survey is completely voluntary and will remain live until Friday the 27th of October. I would encourage you to complete the survey now or later today while the matter is fresh in your mind. Your response is greatly appreciated. If you would like to make any comment please feel free to e-mail me.

Thank you for giving this matter your attention thus far and I hope you would now go to the link at the bottom of this e-mail and follow the instructions given.

Ní neart go cur le chéile. Our strength is in ourselves.

Is mise le meas,

Your's respectfully,

Laurenz Egan
VTOS Coordinator
Coláiste Éile
Slievenamon Road,
Thurles. Co. Tipperary

Phone: 0504 24585
Fax: 0504 21166
E-mail: legan@colaisteeile.ie

<http://www.questionpro.com/akira/TakeSurvey?id=550921&rd=9131189>

Appendix Two**Coordinator online survey**

Authors Note: This survey was completed online and what follows is a downloaded version of the survey into the software package WORD. Many of the user friendly graphics were lost in the download between the statistical package and WORD. Thus what follows is the content of the survey without interference, as inputted into the statistical package template but the manner in which it is graphically presented here is less than how it was presented online.

Welcome VTOS Coordinator to this online quantitative supply side questionnaire. You are invited to take a few minutes to share your local VTOS experience. It will take approximately ten minutes to complete the questionnaire. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. There are no foreseeable risks associated with this project. You must fill in a response to all questions. However, if you feel uncomfortable answering any questions, you can withdraw from the survey at any point. Your survey responses will be strictly confidential and data from this research will be reported only in the aggregate. For security and validity purposes you are only permitted to take this survey once. If you have questions at any time about the survey or the procedures, you may contact Laurenz Egan at 0504 24585 or by e-mail at legan@colaisteeile.ie. Thank you very much for your time and support. Please start with the survey now by clicking on the continue button below.

Gender of VTOS Coordinator.

1. Male
2. Female

How long have you held your VTOS Coordinator position?

1. 1-2 years
2. 3-5 years
3. 6-10 years
4. 11 years plus

In your role, to whom do you immediately report to?

1. A.E.O.
2. C.E.O.
3. School Principal
4. None of these

How many VTOS places do you have at your centre?

1. 1-10
2. 11-20

3. 21- 40
4. 41-79
5. 80-119
6. 120 plus

Which of the following best describes your VTOS student allocation?

1. Core only
2. Disperse Mode only
3. Core and Disperse Mode

Which one of the following best describes your VTOS centre?

1. Stand alone VTOS exclusive centre.
2. Stand alone adult education centre (multiple initiatives).
3. Working within a Secondary school (no PLC).
4. Working within a PLC centre.
5. Working within a Secondary school and PLC centre.
6. None of these.

Which of the following would best describe your VTOS student gender profile?

1. Equally balanced
2. Female dominated
3. Male dominated

Is the building from which you operate owned by your VEC or is it rented/leased?

1. Owned by our VEC
2. Rented or leased

How long has your VTOS programme operated from your current building?

1. 1-2 years
2. 3-5 years
3. 6-10 years
4. 11 years plus

Is your building suitable for your needs?

1. Yes
2. No

Do you fill your VTOS student allocation each year?

1. Yes, with ease.
2. Yes, with effort
3. No

If your VTOS student allocation were increased, do you believe you would have sufficient local demand to fill those extra places?

1. Yes
2. No

You are encouraged to select more than one answer for this question.
Which of the following areas of learning are you currently offering in your centre to CORE students only?

1. City & Guilds
2. ECDL
3. Full Leaving Certificate award
4. Full Junior Certificate award
5. JEB
6. Junior Certificate individual subjects
7. Leaving Certificate Applied
8. Leaving Certificate individual subjects
9. Level 1 FETAC award
10. Level 1 FETAC modules
11. Level 2 FETAC award
12. Level 2 FETAC modules
13. Level 3 FETAC award
14. Level 3 FETAC modules
15. Level 4 FETAC award
16. Level 4 FETAC modules
17. Level 5 FETAC award
18. Level 5 FETAC modules
19. MOUSP
20. Pitman
21. Other _____

Which of the following statements best describes the gender balance of your overall staff?

1. Equally balanced
2. Female dominated
3. Male dominated

How many full-time VTOS tutors (22 hours) excluding you the coordinator do you have at your centre?

1. 0
2. 1-2
3. 3-5
4. 6-10
5. 11

How many part-time VTOS tutors do you have at your centre?

1. 0-3
2. 4-6
3. 9-12
4. 13-16
5. 17 plus

Which of the following best describes your locality?

1. City
 2. Large Town (>30,000 people)
 3. Town (10,000 - 29,000 people)
 4. Small Town (<9,999 people)
-

How many miles away is your nearest VTOS centre?

1. < 5 miles
2. 6 - 10 miles
3. 11 - 30 miles
4. 31 - 40 miles
5. 41 miles plus

Does your VTOS centre have a student council or union with elected representatives?

1. Yes
2. No

Does your VTOS centre provide childcare facilities on site or nearby?

1. Yes
2. No

Does your VTOS centre pay childcare to assist with the cost of minding children of VTOS students?

1. Yes
2. No

Does your VTOS centre organise daily transport for VTOS students?

1. Yes
2. No

In your opinion, do you feel the level of additional funding provided to VTOS students is a fair amount to assist with the extra costs incurred in returning to education?

1. Yes
2. No

Does your centre have Open Days which are publicised locally and if so how often?

1. No
2. Yes - once a year
3. Yes - twice a year
4. Yes more than twice a year

Is the VTOS learning programme which you are offering to your students the same, similar or different to the programme offered five years ago?

1. The same
2. Similar
3. Different

You are encouraged to select more than one answer for this question.

Which of the following do you use to recruit potential VTOS students?

1. Contacting other local agencies.
 2. Encouraging existing students to encourage others.
 3. Fliers.
 4. Local newsletters.
-

- 5. Local newspapers.
- 6. Local radio.
- 7. Posters around locality.
- 8. Taking stands at events.
- 9. Other _____

Please rate EACH of the following list on a sliding scale, in terms of ability to motivate MEN to access and participate in adult education.

	Low Motivating Factor	Somewhat Motivating Factor	Medium Motivating Factor	High Motivating Factor	Highest Motivating Factor
Avail of grant funding.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Avoiding a job with poor conditions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Boost self-confidence / self-esteem.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Encouraged by an organisation or professional.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Encouraged by family member or friend.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Improve overall level of education.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Occupy free time.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Social Contact.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To achieve a personal ambition.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To assist children or grandchildren with school work.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To get a qualification leading to further studies.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To get a qualification leading to a job.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please rate EACH of the following list on a sliding scale, in terms of ability to motivate WOMEN to access and participate in adult education.

	Low Motivating Factor	Somewhat Motivating Factor	Medium Motivating Factor	High Motivating Factor	Highest Motivating Factor
Avail of grant funding.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Avoiding a job with poor conditions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Boost self-confidence / self-esteem.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Encouraged by an organisation or professional.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Encouraged by family member or friend.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Improve overall level of education.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Occupy free time.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Social Contact.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To achieve a personal ambition.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To assist children or grandchildren with school work.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To get a qualification leading to further studies.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To get a qualification leading to a job.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please rate Each of the following list on a sliding scale, in terms of ability to prevent MEN accessing and participating in adult education (i.e. barriers).

	Lowest Level Barrier	Low Level Barrier	Medium Level Barrier	High Level Barrier	Highest Level Barrier
Family commitments.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fear of failure.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Feeling too old.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Guilt / Feeling selfish.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lack of information.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Loss of income (Unavailable for work).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Low self-confidence / self-esteem.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Low literacy level.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Negative experience of initial schooling.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Peer pressure.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pressure on personal finances.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Physical disability.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Transport.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

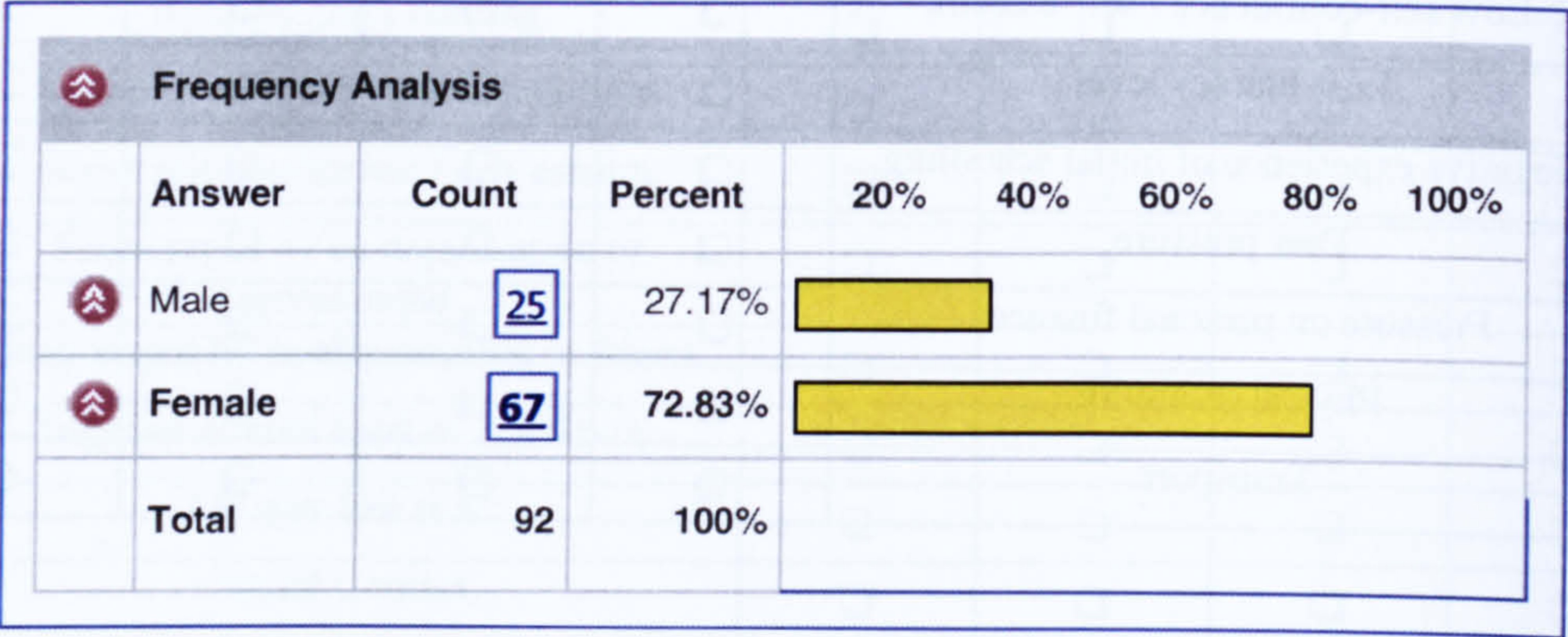
Please rate Each of the following list on a sliding scale, in terms of ability to prevent WOMEN accessing and participating in adult education (i.e. barriers).

	Lowest Level Barrier	Low Level Barrier	Medium Level Barrier	High Level Barrier	Highest Level Barrier
Family commitments.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fear of failure.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Feeling too old.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Guilt / Feeling selfish.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lack of information.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Loss of income (Unavailable for work).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Low self-confidence / self-esteem.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Low literacy level.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Negative experience of initial schooling.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Peer pressure.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pressure on personal finances.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Physical disability.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Transport.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

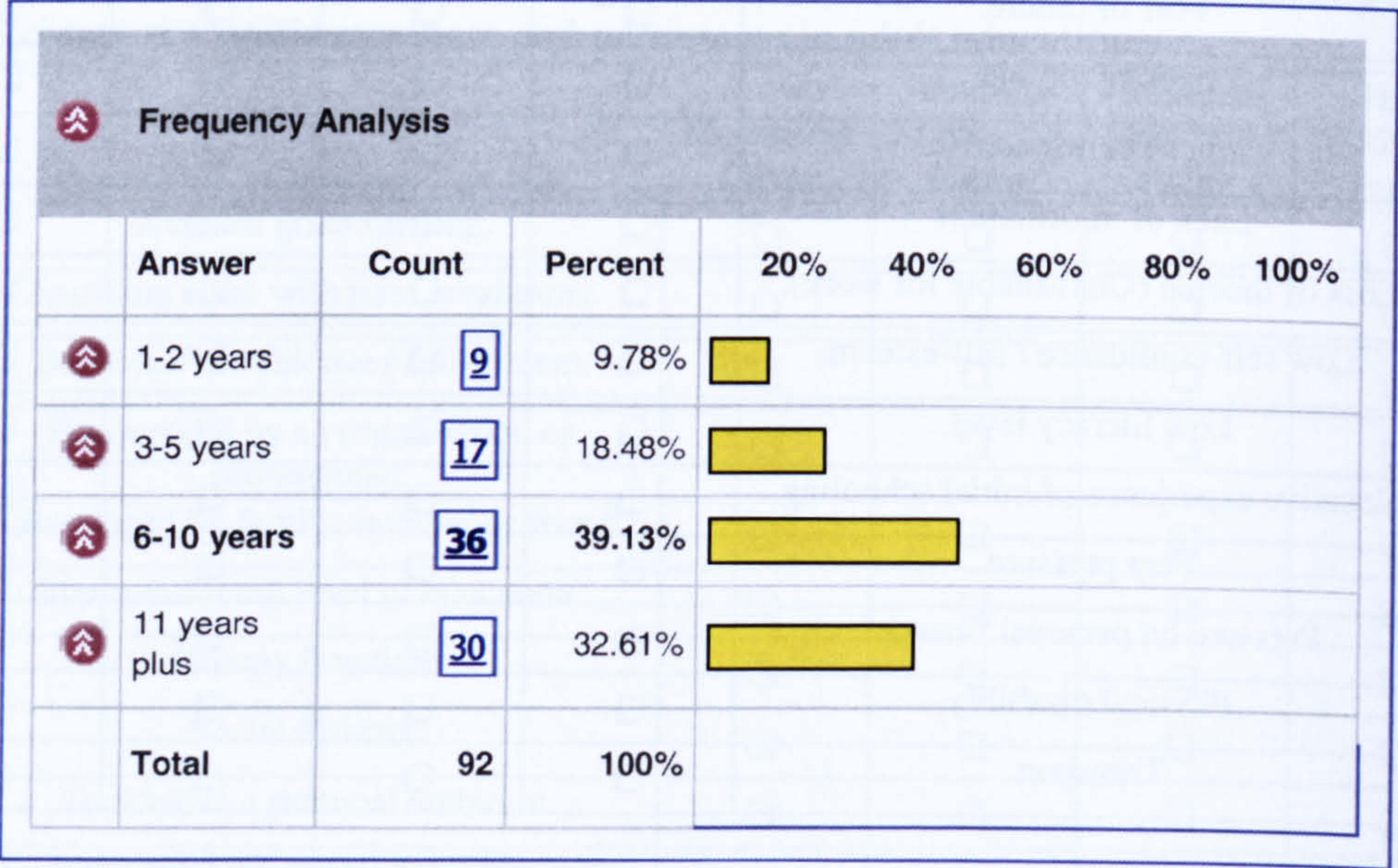
Appendix Three Coordinator survey results

The following Tables are summary extracts from the initial study. The statistical responses were generated using www.questionpro.com.

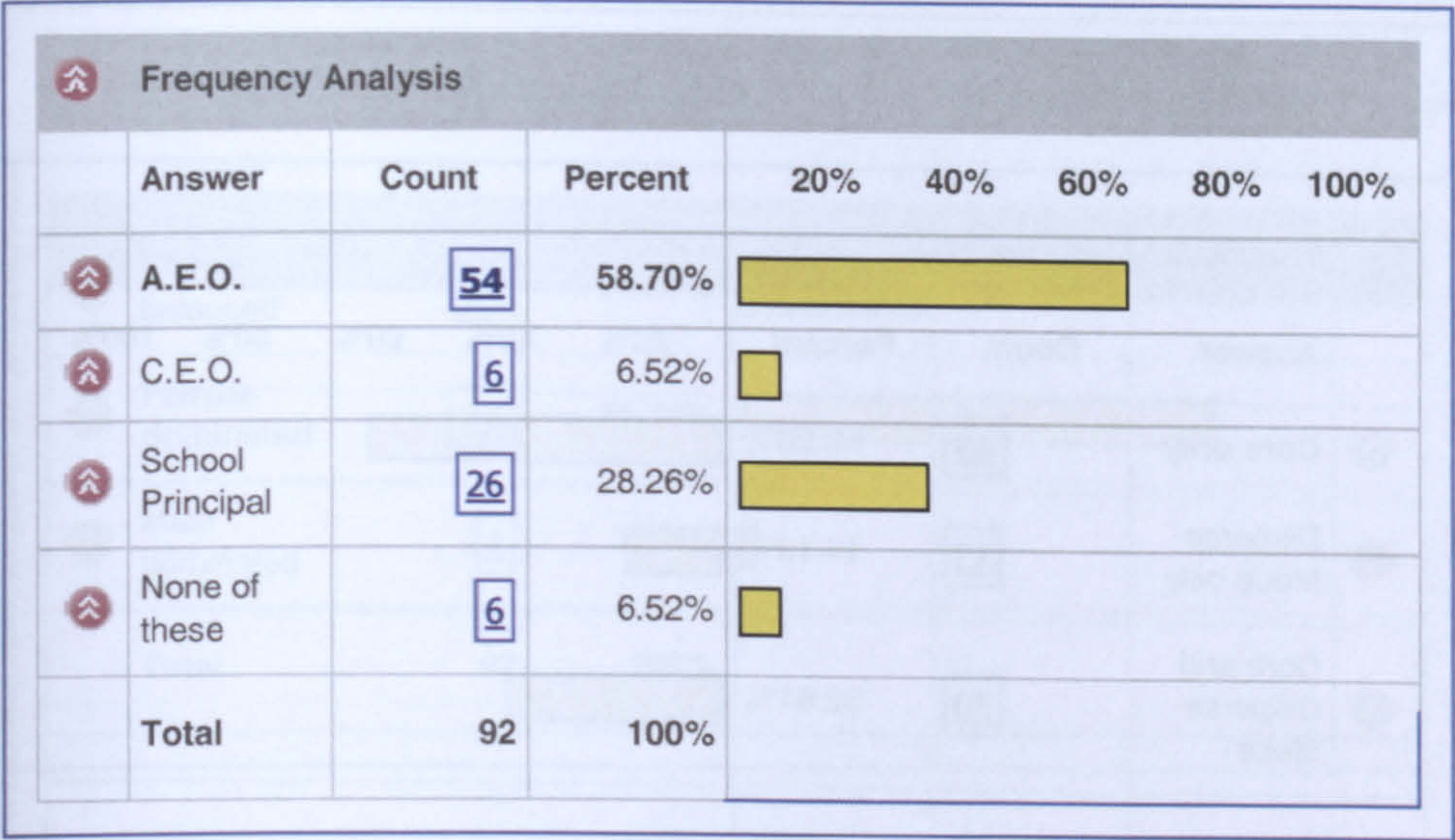
Gender of VTOS Coordinator



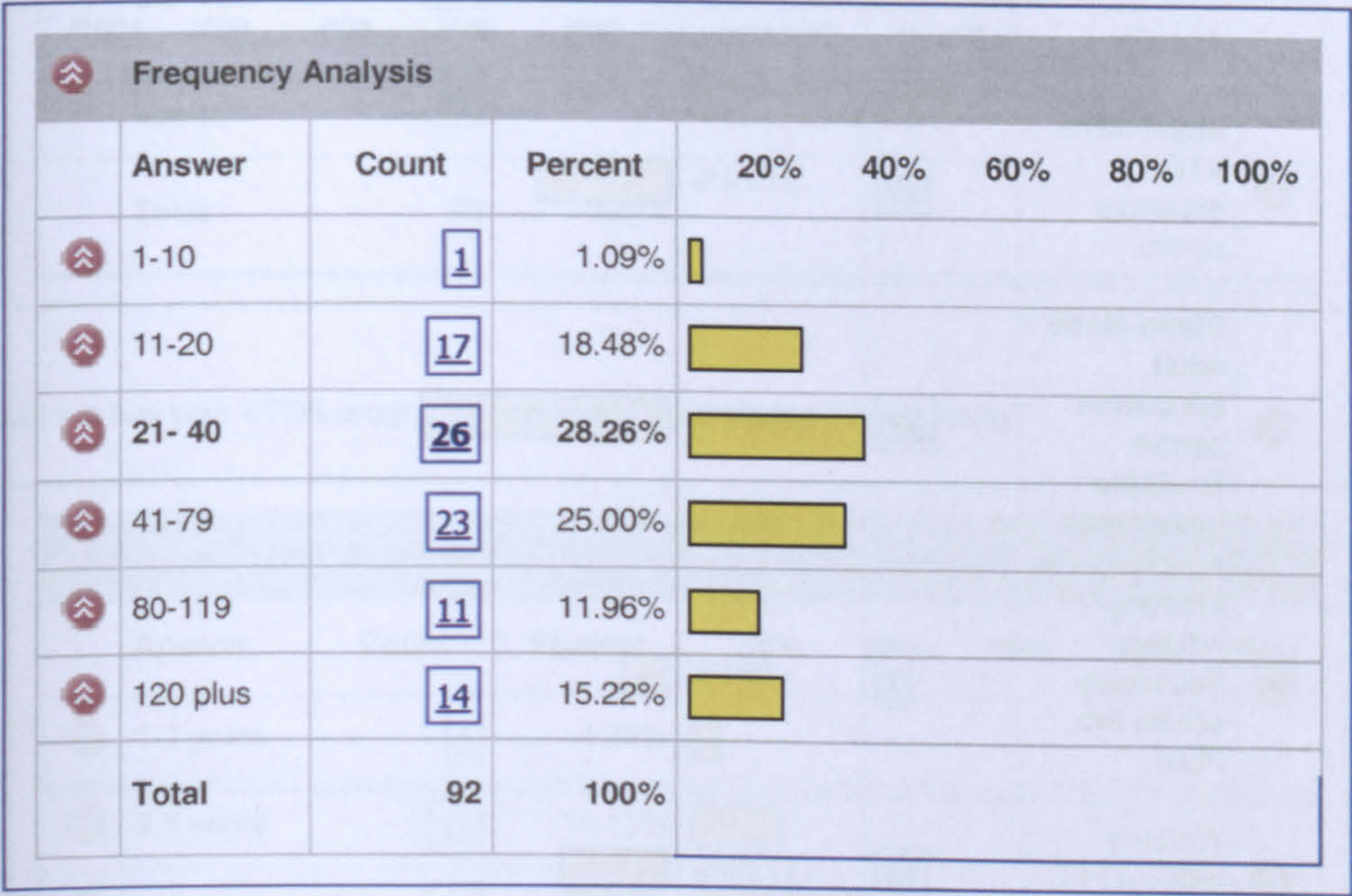
How long have you held your VTOS Coordinator position?



In your role, to whom do you immediately report to?



How many VTOS places do you have at your centre?



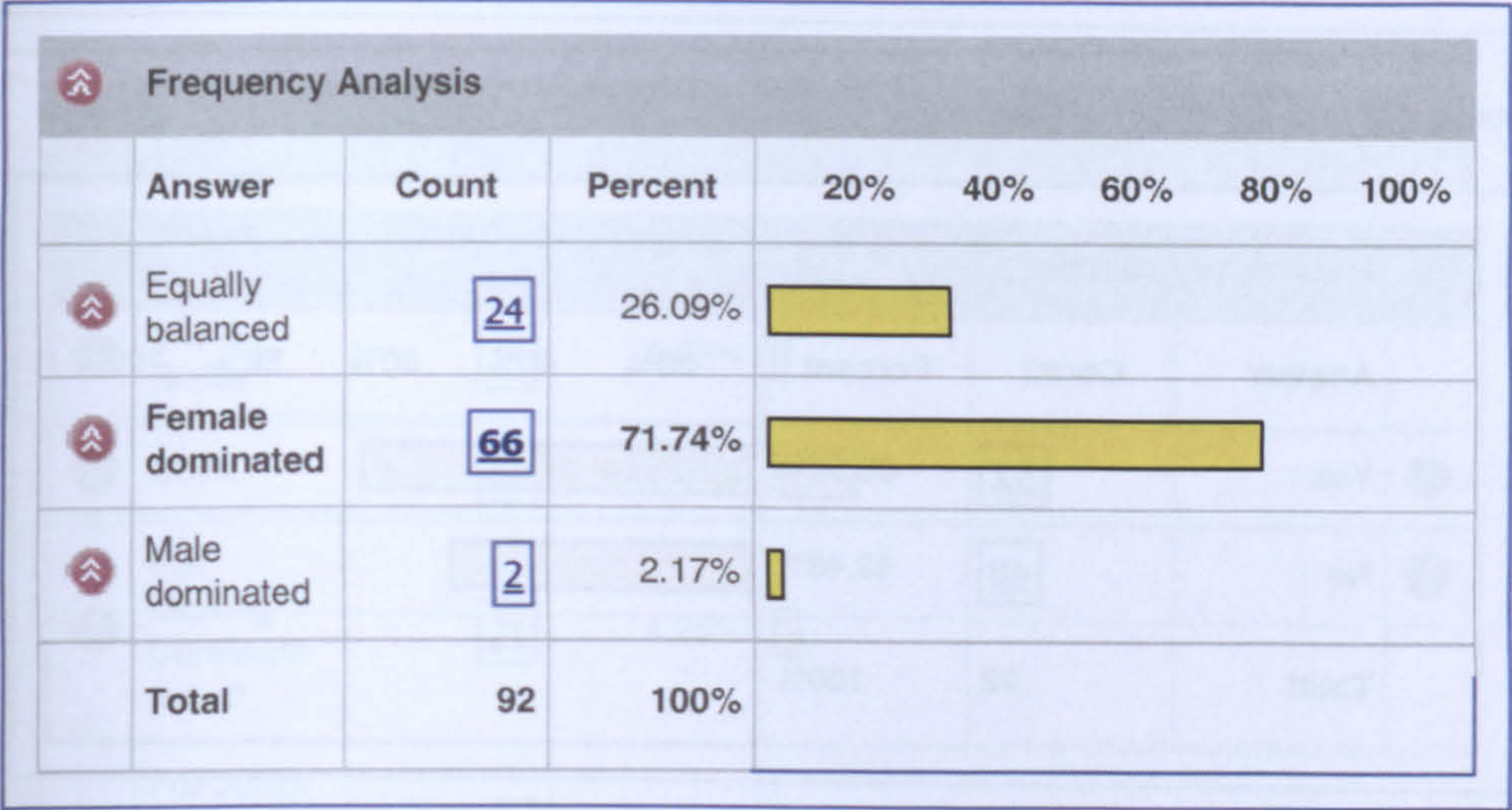
Which of the following best describes your VTOS student allocation?

Frequency Analysis				
	Answer	Count	Percent	20% 40% 60% 80% 100%
	Core only	49	53.26%	<div></div>
	Disperse Mode only	13	14.13%	<div></div>
	Core and Disperse Mode	30	32.61%	<div></div>
	Total	92	100%	

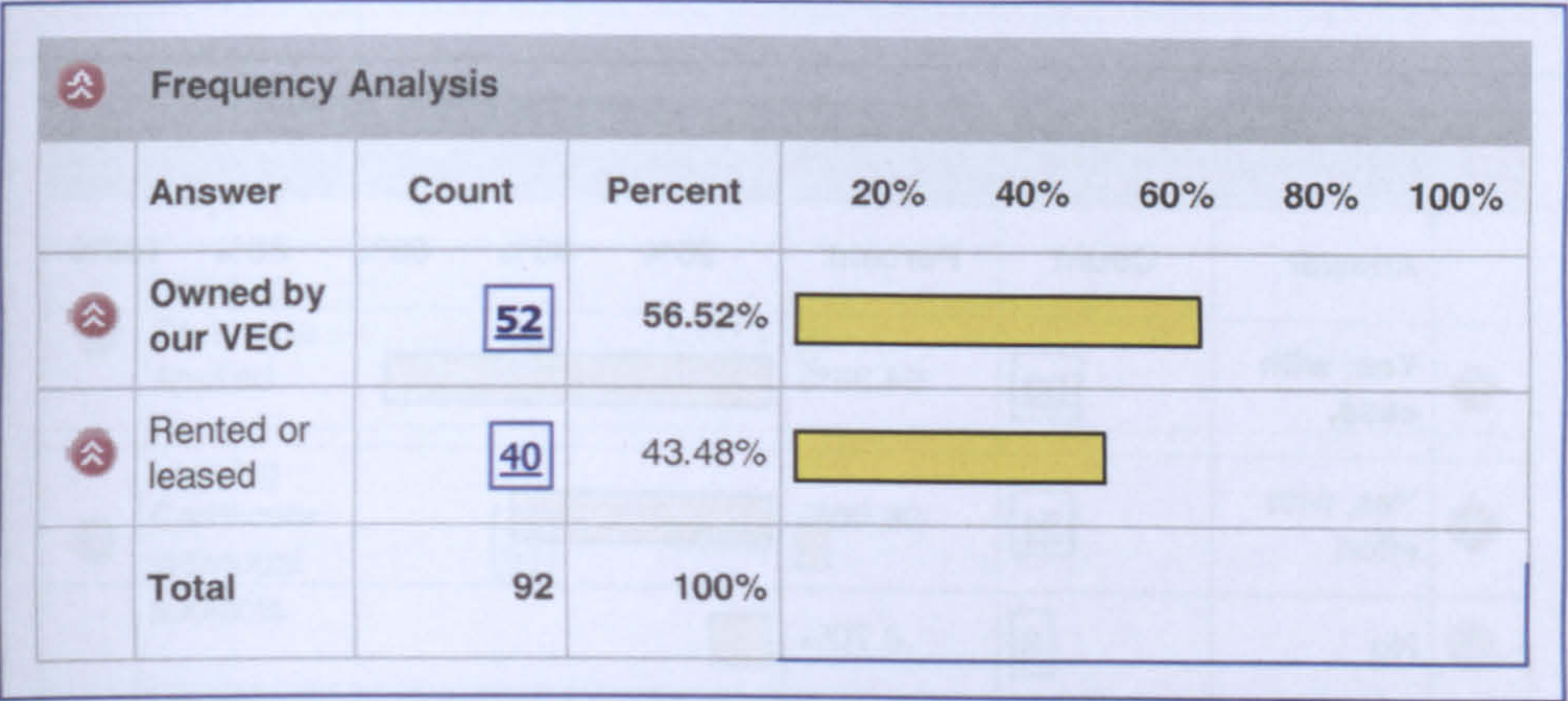
Which one of the following best describes your VTOS centre?

Frequency Analysis				
	Answer	Count	Percent	20% 40% 60% 80% 100%
	Stand alone VTOS exclusive centre.	20	21.74%	<div></div>
	Stand alone adult education centre (multiple initiatives).	37	40.22%	<div></div>
	Working within a Secondary school (no PLC).	7	7.61%	<div></div>
	Working within a PLC centre.	16	17.39%	<div></div>
	Working within a Secondary school and PLC centre.	5	5.43%	<div></div>
	None of these.	7	7.61%	<div></div>
	Total	92	100%	

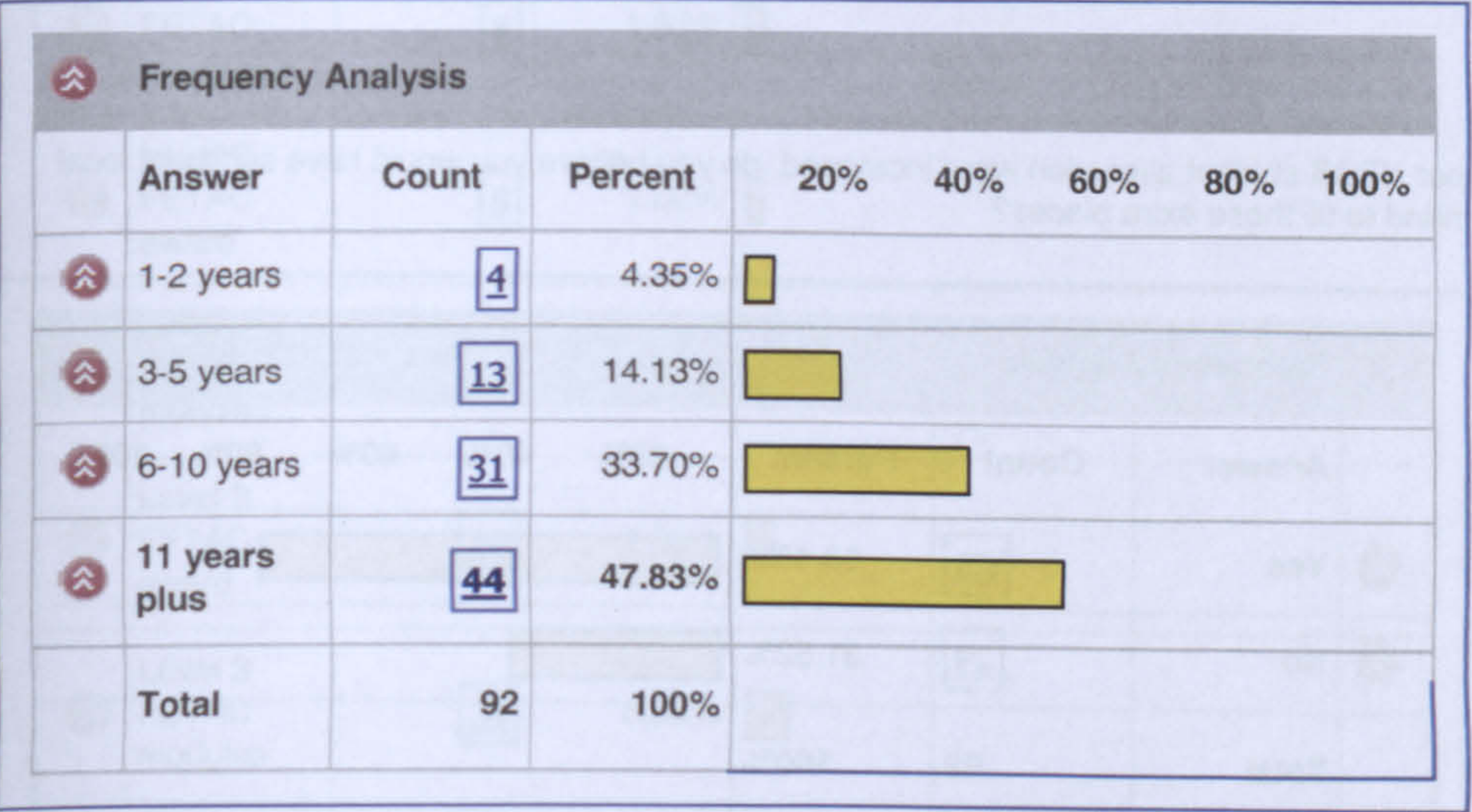
Which of the following would best describe your VTOS student gender profile?



Is the building from which you operate owned by your VEC or is it rented/leased?



How long has your VTOS programme operated from your current building?



Is your building suitable for your needs?

Frequency Analysis								
	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
	Yes	52	56.52%	<div></div>				
	No	40	43.48%	<div></div>				
	Total	92	100%					

Do you fill your VTOS student allocation each year?

Frequency Analysis								
	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
	Yes, with ease.	50	54.35%	<div></div>				
	Yes, with effort	34	36.96%	<div></div>				
	No	8	8.70%	<div></div>				
	Total	92	100%					

If your VTOS student allocation were increased, do you believe you would have sufficient local demand to fill those extra places?

Frequency Analysis								
	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
	Yes	63	68.48%	<div></div>				
	No	29	31.52%	<div></div>				
	Total	92	100%					

Which of the following areas of learning are you currently offering in your centre to CORE students only?

Frequency Analysis								
	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
	City & Guilds	14	2.83%	<div></div>				
	ECDL	62	12.55%	<div></div>				
	Full Leaving Certificate award	21	4.25%	<div></div>				
	Full Junior Certificate award	4	0.81%	<div></div>				
	JEB	1	0.20%	<div></div>				
	Junior Certificate individual subjects	17	3.44%	<div></div>				
	Leaving Certificate Applied	0	0.00%	<div></div>				
	Leaving Certificate individual subjects	24	4.86%	<div></div>				
	Level 1 FETAC award	5	1.01%	<div></div>				
	Level 1 FETAC modules	8	1.62%	<div></div>				
	Level 2 FETAC award	8	1.62%	<div></div>				
	Level 2 FETAC modules	10	2.02%	<div></div>				
	Level 3 FETAC award	21	4.25%	<div></div>				
	Level 3 FETAC modules	34	6.88%	<div></div>				
	Level 4	34	6.88%	<div></div>				

	FETAC award			
⬆	Level 4 FETAC modules	54	10.93%	<div></div>
⬆	Level 5 FETAC award	69	13.97%	<div></div>
⬆	Level 5 FETAC modules	60	12.15%	<div></div>
⬆	MOUSP	6	1.21%	<div></div>
⬆	Pitman	7	1.42%	<div></div>
⬆	<u>Other</u>	35	7.09%	<div></div>
	Total	494	100%	

Which of the following statements best describes the gender balance of your overall staff?

⬆ Frequency Analysis							
	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80% 100%
⬆	Equally balanced	15	16.30%	<div></div>			
⬆	Female dominated	75	81.52%	<div></div>			
⬆	Male dominated	2	2.17%	<div></div>			
	Total	92	100%				

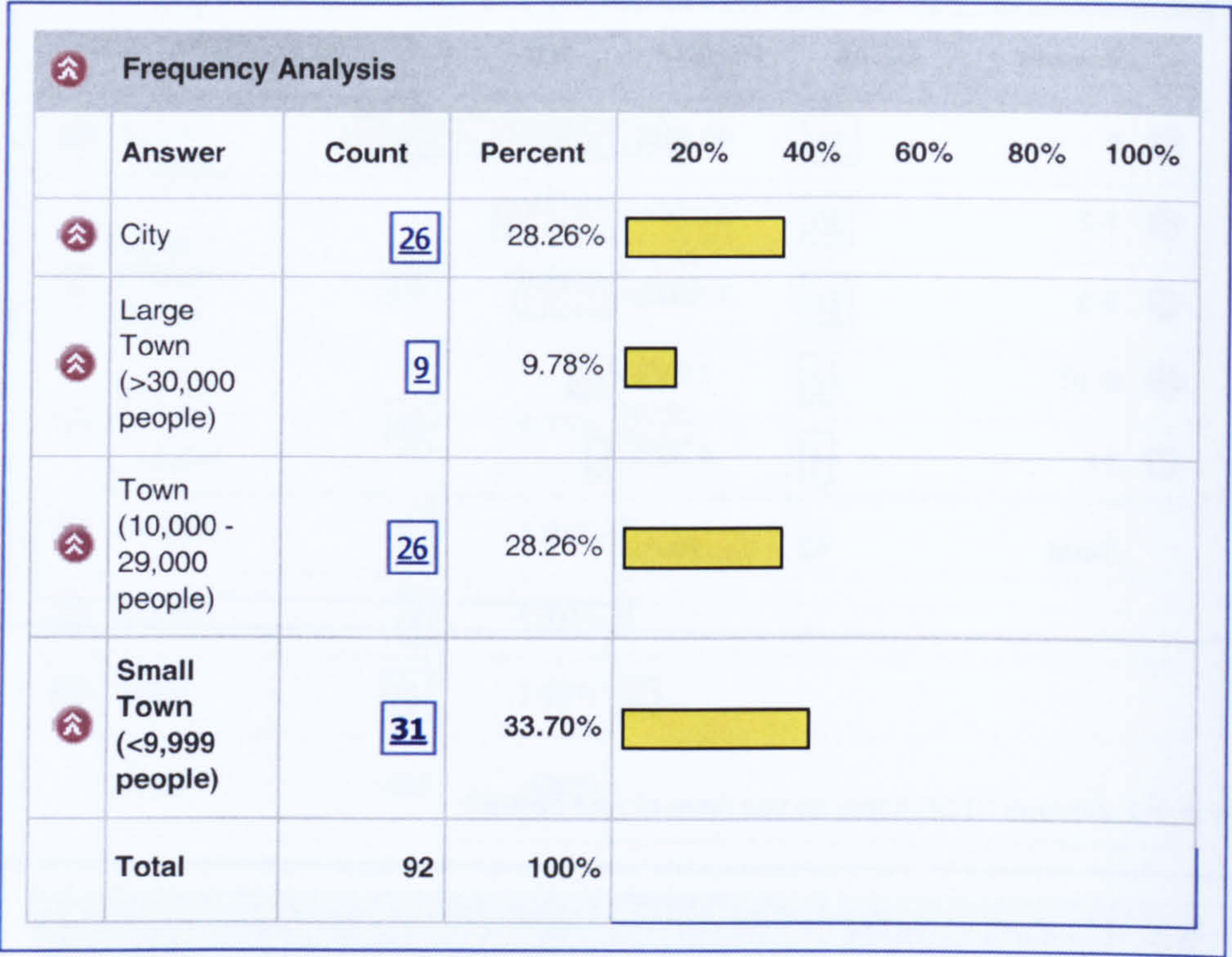
How many full-time VTOS tutors (22 hours) excluding you the coordinator do you have at your centre?

Frequency Analysis								
	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
	0	45	48.91%	<div></div>				
	1-2	20	21.74%	<div></div>				
	3-5	16	17.39%	<div></div>				
	6-10	7	7.61%	<div></div>				
	11	4	4.35%	<div></div>				
	Total	92	100%					

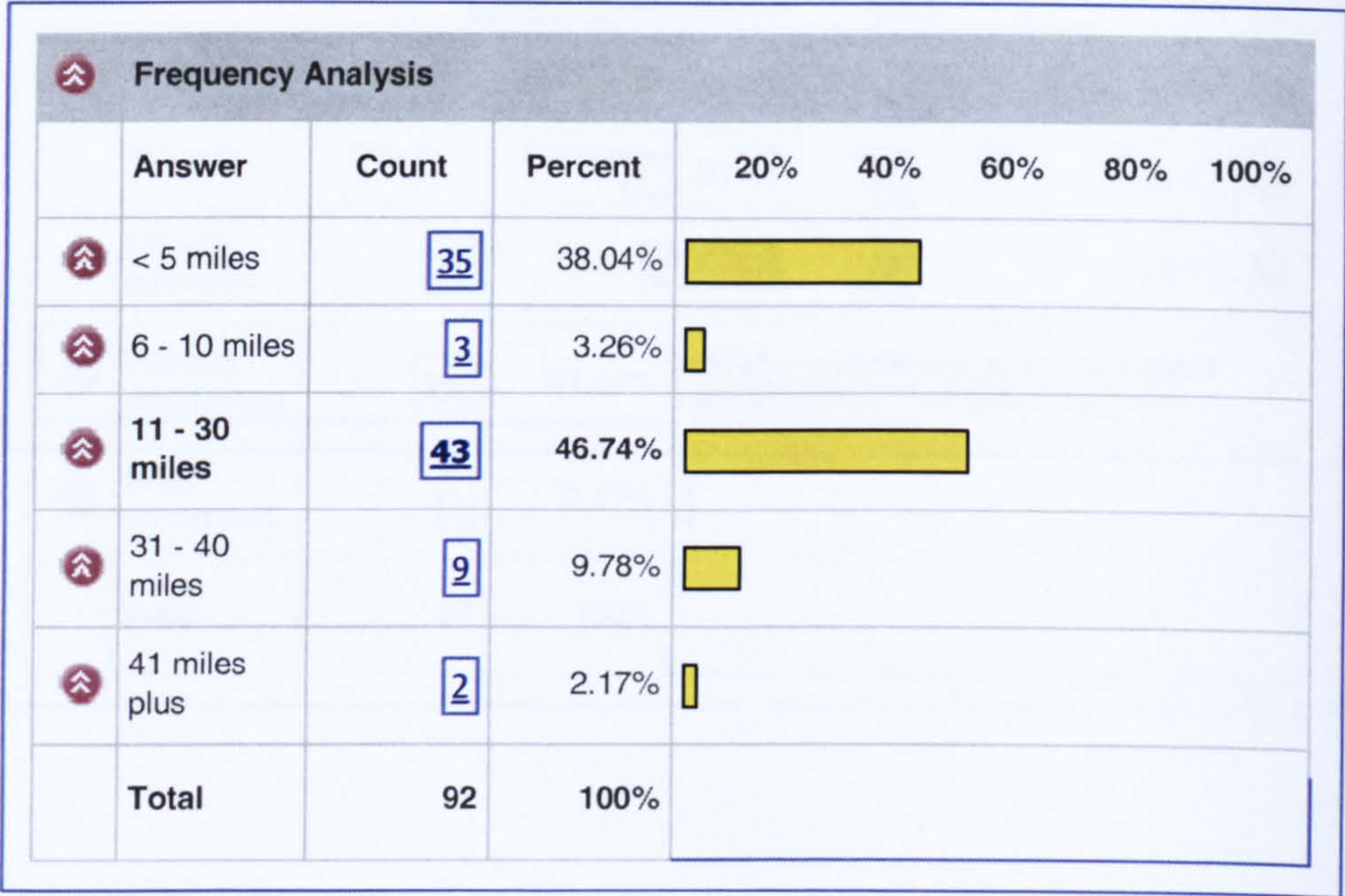
How many part-time VTOS tutors do you have at your centre?

Frequency Analysis								
	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
	0-3	35	38.04%	<div></div>				
	4-6	30	32.61%	<div></div>				
	9-12	16	17.39%	<div></div>				
	13-16	7	7.61%	<div></div>				
	17 plus	4	4.35%	<div></div>				
	Total	92	100%					

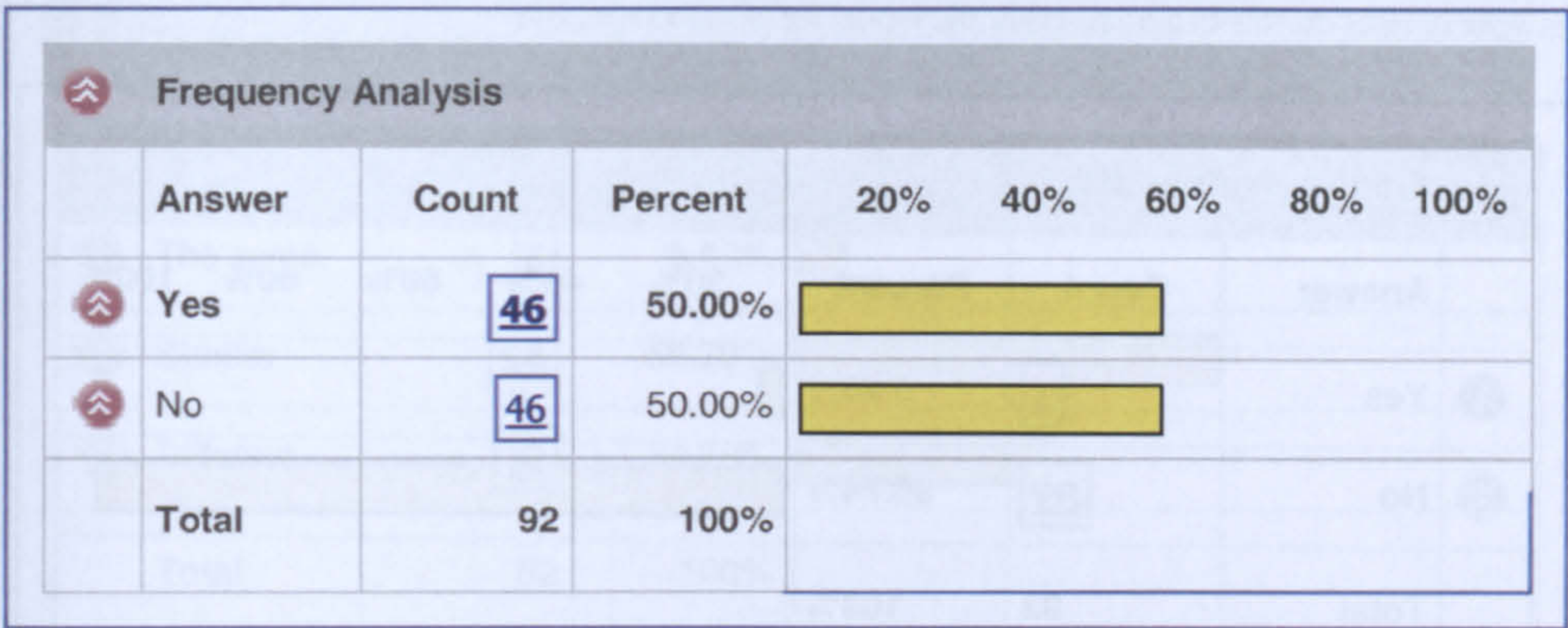
Which of the following best describes your locality?



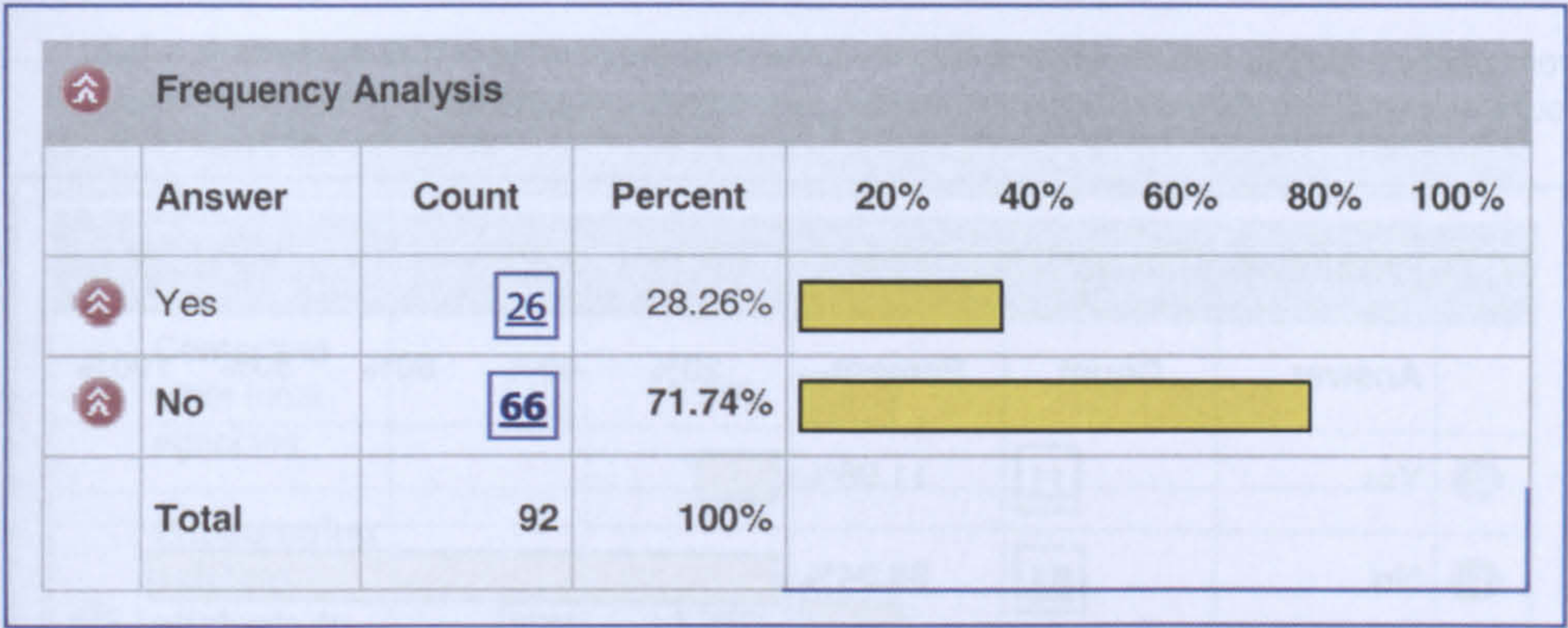
How many miles away is your nearest VTOS centre?



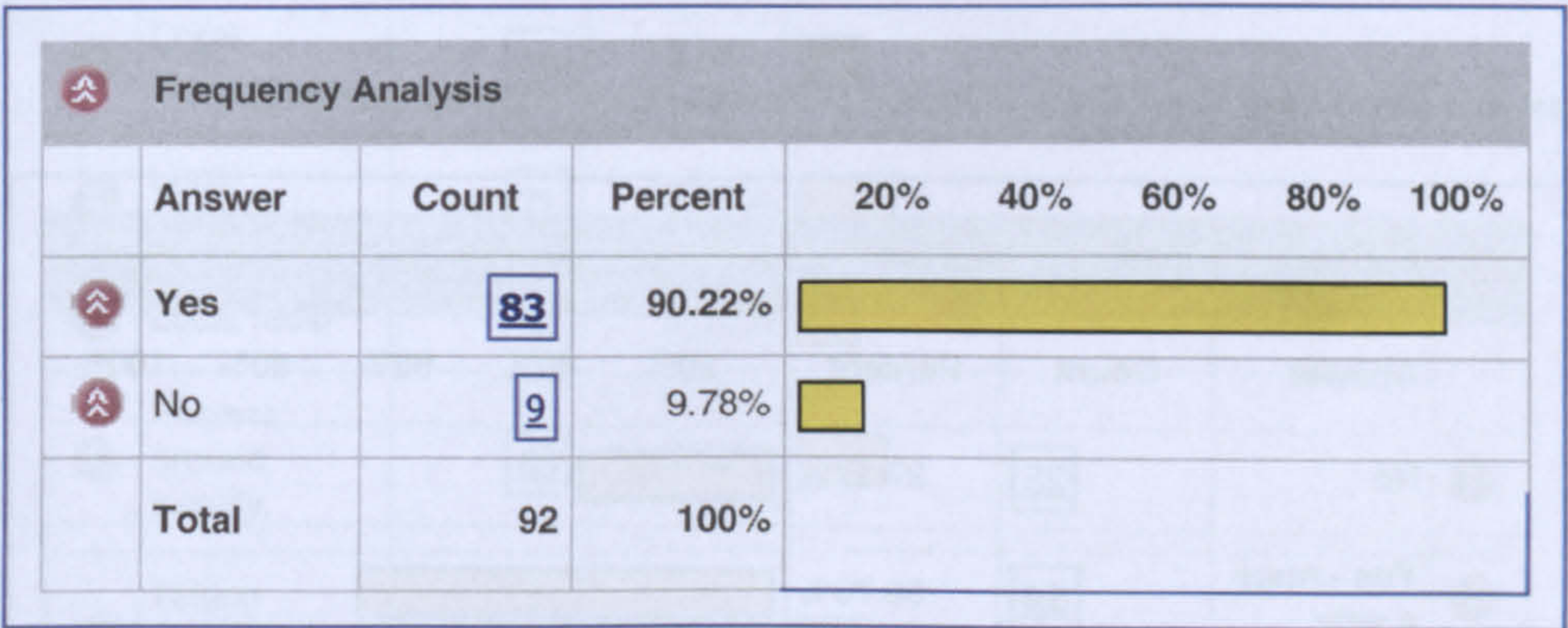
Does your VTOS centre have a student council or union with elected representatives?



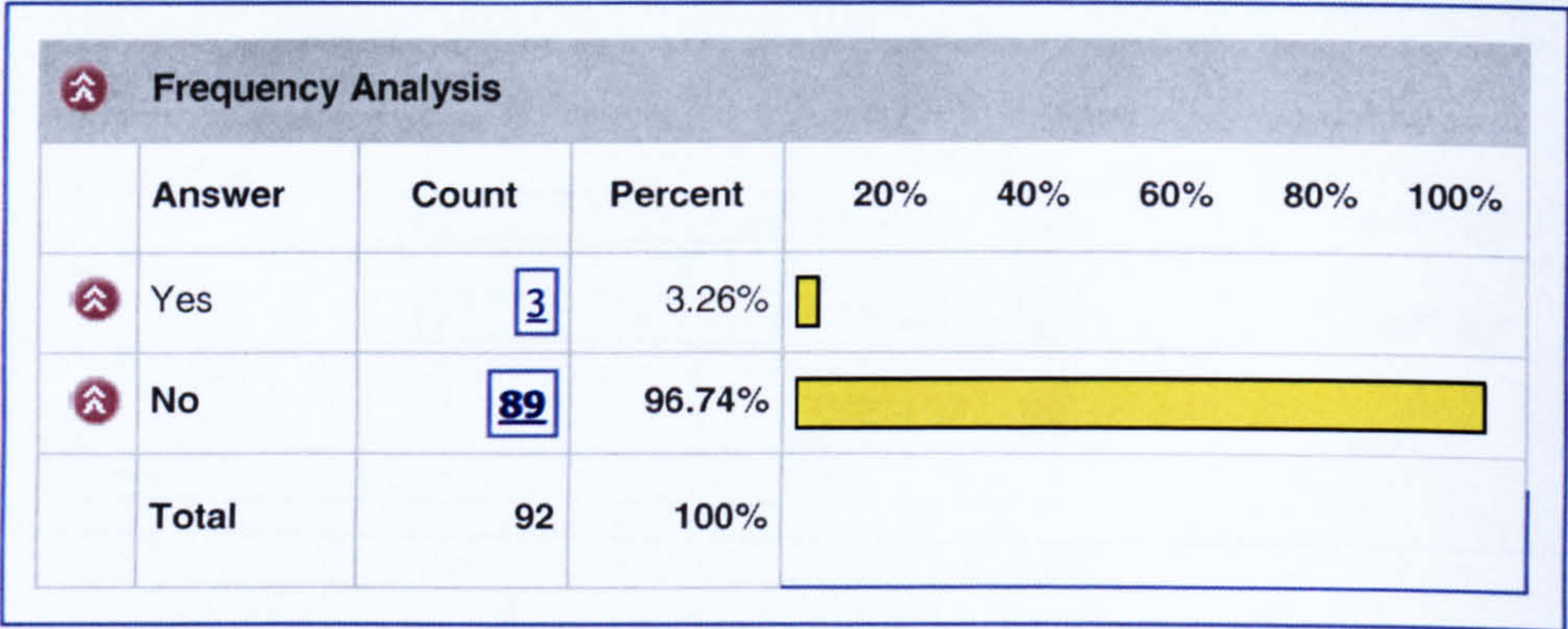
Does your VTOS centre provide childcare facilities on site or nearby?



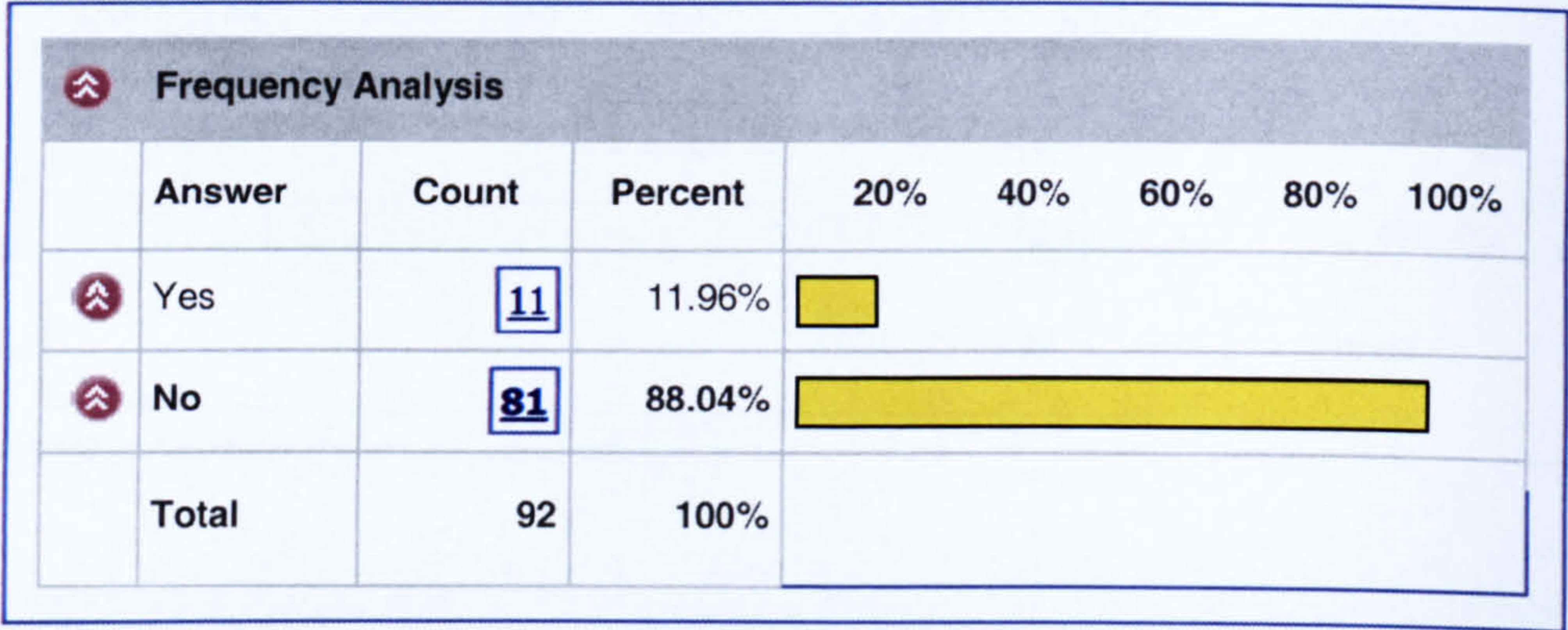
Does your VTOS centre pay childcare to assist with the cost of minding children of VTOS students?



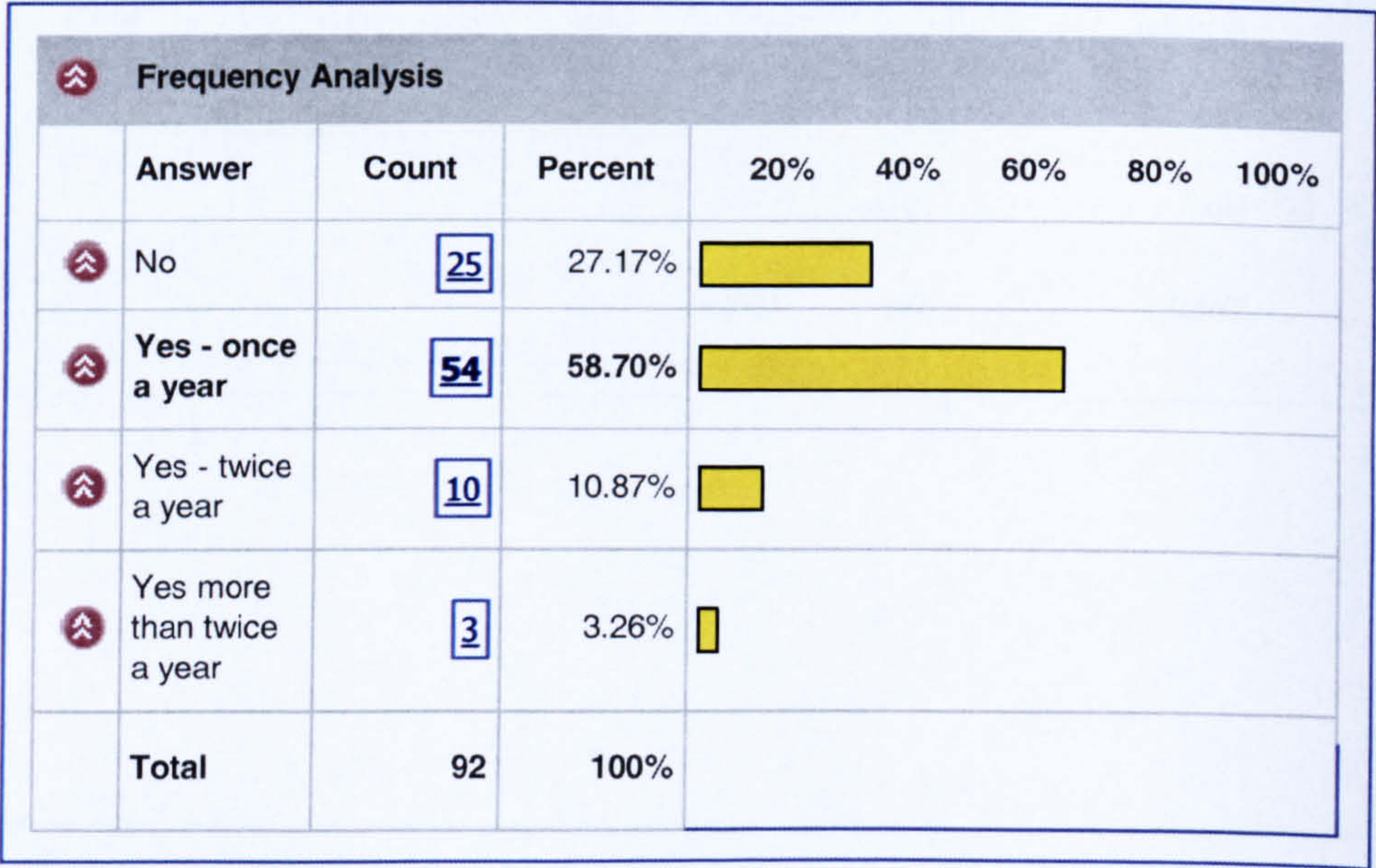
Does your VTOS centre organise daily transport for VTOS students?



In your opinion, do you feel the level of additional funding provided to VTOS students is a fair amount to assist with the extra costs incurred in returning to education?



Does your centre have 'Open Days' which are publicised locally and if so how often?



Is the VTOS learning programme which you are offering to your students the same, similar or different to the programme offered five years ago?

Frequency Analysis				
	Answer	Count	Percent	20% 40% 60% 80% 100%
	The same	6	6.52%	<div></div>
	Similar	54	58.70%	<div></div>
	Different	32	34.78%	<div></div>
	Total	92	100%	

Which of the following do you use to recruit potential VTOS students?

Frequency Analysis				
	Answer	Count	Percent	20% 40% 60% 80% 100%
	Contacting other local agencies.	70	13.59%	<div></div>
	Encouraging existing students to encourage others.	77	14.95%	<div></div>
	Fliers.	61	11.84%	<div></div>
	Local newsletters.	49	9.51%	<div></div>
	Local newspapers.	71	13.79%	<div></div>
	Local radio.	42	8.16%	<div></div>
	Posters around locality.	65	12.62%	<div></div>
	Taking stands at events.	54	10.49%	<div></div>
	Other	26	5.05%	<div></div>
	Total	515	100%	

Please rate EACH of the following list on a sliding scale, in terms of ability to motivate MEN to access and participate in adult education.

Overall Matrix Scorecard				
	Question	Count	Score	<div>Low Motivating Factor</div> <div>Somewhat Motivating Factor</div> <div>Medium Motivating Factor</div> <div>High Motivating Factor</div> <div>Highest Motivating Factor</div>
1.	Avail of grant funding.	92	3.315	<div></div>
2.	Avoiding a job with poor conditions.	92	3.207	<div></div>
3.	Boost self-confidence / self-esteem.	92	3.033	<div></div>
4.	Encouraged by an organisation or professional.	92	2.804	<div></div>
5.	Encouraged by family member or friend.	92	3.239	<div></div>
6.	Improve overall level of education.	92	3.587	<div></div>
7.	Occupy free time.	92	2.598	<div></div>
8.	Social Contact.	92	2.696	<div></div>
9.	To achieve a personal ambition.	92	3.576	<div></div>
10.	To assist children or grandchildren with school work.	92	2.304	<div></div>
11.	To get a qualification leading to further studies.	92	3.620	<div></div>
12.	To get a qualification leading to a job.	92	4.152	<div></div>
Average			3.178	

Please rate EACH of the following list on a sliding scale, in terms of ability to motivate WOMEN to access and participate in adult education.

Overall Matrix Scorecard				
	Question	Count	Score	<div><div>Low Motivating Factor</div><div>Somewhat Motivating Factor</div><div>Medium Motivating Factor</div><div>High Motivating Factor</div><div>Highest Motivating Factor</div></div>
1.	Avail of grant funding.	92	3.380	<div></div>
2.	Avoiding a job with poor conditions.	92	3.413	<div></div>
3.	Boost self-confidence / self-esteem.	92	3.957	<div></div>
4.	Encouraged by an organisation or professional.	92	3.076	<div></div>
5.	Encouraged by family member or friend.	92	3.750	<div></div>
6.	Improve overall level of education.	92	3.989	<div></div>
7.	Occupy free time.	92	2.946	<div></div>
8.	Social Contact.	92	3.641	<div></div>
9.	To achieve a personal ambition.	92	3.935	<div></div>
10.	To assist children or grandchildren with school work.	92	3.435	<div></div>
11.	To get a qualification leading to further studies.	92	3.859	<div></div>
12.	To get a qualification leading to a job.	92	4.272	<div></div>
Average			3.638	

Please rate Each of the following list on a sliding scale, in terms of ability to prevent MEN accessing and participating in adult education (i.e. barriers).

Overall Matrix Scorecard				
	Question	Count	Score	Lowest Level Barrier Low Level Barrier Medium Level Barrier High Level Barrier Highest Level Barrier
1.	Family commitments.	92	2.413	<div></div>
2.	Fear of failure.	92	3.587	<div></div>
3.	Feeling too old.	92	3.522	<div></div>
4.	Guilt / Feeling selfish.	92	2.293	<div></div>
5.	Lack of information.	92	3.098	<div></div>
6.	Loss of income (Unavailable for work).	92	3.728	<div></div>
7.	Low self-confidence / self-esteem.	92	3.685	<div></div>
8.	Low literacy level.	92	3.543	<div></div>
9.	Negative experience of initial schooling.	92	3.880	<div></div>
10.	Peer pressure.	92	3.250	<div></div>
11.	Pressure on personal finances.	92	3.913	<div></div>
12.	Phyical disability.	92	2.478	<div></div>
13.	Transport.	92	2.565	<div></div>
Average			3.227	

Please rate Each of the following list on a sliding scale, in terms of ability to prevent WOMEN accessing and participating in adult education (i.e. barriers).

Overall Matrix Scorecard				
	Question	Count	Score	Lowest Level Barrier Low Level Barrier Medium Level Barrier High Level Barrier Highest Level Barrier
1.	Family commitments.	93	4.430	<div></div>
2.	Fear of failure.	93	3.430	<div></div>
3.	Feeling too old.	93	3.194	<div></div>
4.	Guilt / Feeling selfish.	93	3.183	<div></div>
5.	Lack of information.	93	2.925	<div></div>
6.	Loss of income (Unavailable for work).	93	2.903	<div></div>
7.	Low self-confidence / self-esteem.	93	3.677	<div></div>
8.	Low literacy level.	93	3.151	<div></div>
9.	Negative experience of initial schooling.	93	3.441	<div></div>
10.	Peer pressure.	93	2.237	<div></div>
11.	Pressure on personal finances.	93	3.559	<div></div>
12.	Physical disability.	93	2.312	<div></div>
13.	Transport.	93	2.731	<div></div>
Average			3.167	

Appendix Four Request of coordinators

15th November 2007.

Dear VTOS colleague,

I am seeking your support to facilitate the distribution of an online VTOS survey to all of your CORE students only. *If your centre is disperse mode only then please ignore this request.* This survey is completely anonymous and so no centres or people can be identified.

The overall aim of this research process is to uncover learners' motivations to return (or not to return) to VTOS and to better understand the obstacles encountered by such adults. It is hoped that the findings of this research would further improve the following aspects of VTOS; widening participation, recruitment, admissions, retention, achievement and programme delivery. This research is part of a doctoral programme of study and has been approved by the Open Universities Research Ethics Committee.

This time last year VTOS coordinators throughout the country were invited to participate in an online survey specific to VTOS, over ninety percent of coordinators nationally responded to the survey and I hope to present those findings at the next AGM of the National Association of VTOS Coordinators.

The next phase of the research project is to get the views of the students themselves. As you know there are approximately 3,500 core VTOS students nationally and I hope with your support to get the views of between 350 (minimum) and 1000 (maximum). I hope to complete the bulk of this work by the first week of December.

PTO

You are welcome to inform your immediate manager/supervisor of this exercise and feel free to forward this information if it is requested of you. This research has the support of Helen Keogh, National VTOS Coordinator, David Leahy, CEO, North Tipperary VEC, Antoinette Coffey, AEO, North Tipperary VEC and Mervyn Griffin, Chair, National Association of VTOS Coordinators.

Finally I would simply ask you to e-mail me at the following address; legan@colaisteeile.ie to indicate if you are willing to support this national learner centred exercise or not. I appreciate the many demands on your time and if you are able to nominate another member of your staff (preferably an IT tutor or administrator) to assist in this task that would be most acceptable. If you indicate that you are willing to support this research you will receive the survey by e-mail for your own consideration as well as an instruction sheet for you or your nominated member of staff.

This postal letter will also be sent by e-mail.

Thanking you for giving this matter your attention and hoping you can support this research.

Is mise le meas,

Laurenz Egan

VTOS Coordinator

Appendix Five Instruction manual for survey

Instruction Sheet for VTOS Coordinator or nominated staff member for the facilitation of the online student survey.

Please note for students to be able to participate in this survey they each must have;

an e-mail address, and,

access to the Internet.

Before the Survey

1. Read the attached statement to all your Core VTOS students at an appropriate time during the working day. At that time ask which of them would be willing to participate in this survey, take note of the names.
2. Compile a list of all e-mail addresses (*double checking the detail*) of those core students willing to participate on one e-mail to myself also giving me an e-mail address for the coordinator or a tutor whom you may assign to this exercise. Please indicate a day and time you would like to receive it by (to suit your schedule).

Please reassure students that whilst they are submitting an e-mail address, the link they will activate is anonymous and so no person could identify the source of any completed survey.

3. I can then send the survey to each of the e-mail addresses I receive at a time convenient to the centre. Each student should be informed as to when to expect this e-mail and if for any reason they don't, they should notify you as soon as possible and I can resend if necessary.
4. Arrange for students to have access to an Internet enabled computer room (ideally during class time) and to have you or an assigned tutor present. The survey should take no more than 15 minutes to complete.
5. Check that all relevant students have received the e-mail.

The Survey itself.

The most convenient manner to administer the survey is during an IT class period and to conduct the survey with as large a group as possible.

Before commencing each student should first check that they have received an e-mail from myself, 'Laurenz' with a subject line 'VTOS student survey'. Each e-mail has a unique link which cannot be copied so *each unique link can only be completed once*.

At the bottom of the e-mail is a link to the online survey. At the same time get all students to click on the link and then answer the questions. *Responses are required to all questions.*

Students should be given assistance in relation to questions 11 and 12.

- Please note that question 11 relates to the national framework of qualifications and you may need to assist your learners to ensure they are aware of the NQF level at which they are studying.
- Question 12 asks students to describe the type of centre they are studying at and again you should offer assistance in relation to this question also.

*Appendix Six**Student survey invitation*

Message to Core VTOS Students

Dear VTOS student,

As an adult student and a VTOS coordinator who supports adult learning I am hoping you would be willing to give around fifteen minutes of your time to fill in an online Internet survey. The survey is about VTOS and the opinions of VTOS students. This survey is part of a course which I am doing. It is *completely anonymous and voluntary* and you are encouraged to be as honest as possible. More specifically the survey is about students' motivations to do a VTOS course and to better understand the obstacles encountered by such adults.

You are one of approximately 3,500 VTOS Core Students and your participation could help influence the direction of VTOS going into the future. If you are willing to participate further information will be given to you by your VTOS coordinator or a nominated member of staff. At any time during the survey you can choose to exit the survey and the survey is completed by 'ticking the boxes'.

Thank you for your attention to this matter and I hope you would be willing to contribute to this survey which is being circulated throughout the country. For further information please ask your VTOS coordinator or nominated staff member.

Yours sincerely,

Laurenz Egan, VTOS Coordinator.

Appendix Seven Student survey questions

Authors Note: This survey was completed online and what follows is a downloaded version of the survey into the software package WORD. Many of the user friendly graphics were lost in the download between the statistical package and WORD. Thus what follows is the content of the survey without interference, as inputted into the statistical package template but the manner in which it is graphically presented here is less than how it was presented online.

Welcome VTOS Student to this online questionnaire. For security and validity purposes you are only permitted to take this survey once. If you have questions at any time about the survey or the procedures, please consult your VTOS coordinator or direct your query to the following e-mail; legan@colaisteeile.ie. Thank you very much for your time. Please note that by clicking on the continue button you are indicating your voluntary consent to participate in this survey. Please start the survey now by clicking on the continue button below.

Gender

1. Male
2. Female

Age

1. 21-30
2. 31-44
3. 45-55
4. 56+

Where were you born?

1. Ireland
2. Other EU Country
3. Other _____

Marital Status

1. Co-habiting
2. Divorced/Separated
3. Married
4. Single
5. Widowed
6. Other _____

Which one of the following qualifying categories applies to you?

1. Disability Allowance / Benefit
2. One Parent Family Payment
3. Unemployment Assistance / Benefit
4. Dependent Spouse of an eligible person
5. Signing for Credits
6. Other _____

Which year of your VTOS course are you in now?

1. 1st Year
2. 2nd Year
3. 3rd Year

How far do you travel to attend your VTOS course (one way)?

1. Less than 1 Mile
2. 1 - 3 Miles
3. 4 - 8 Miles
4. 9 Miles (or more)

How do you usually travel to and from your VTOS course?

1. Drive
2. Get a lift
3. Public Transport
4. Walk / Bicycle
5. Other _____

Which of the following best describes the area where you now live?

1. City
2. Large Town (>30,000)
3. Town (<30,000)
4. Village / Countryside

Please choose your highest educational qualification prior to joining VTOS. (Choose only one). If your qualifications are from outside Ireland, please pick the option which is closest to the level of your own educational qualifications or you can enter your particular qualification in the Other option.

1. None
2. Primary Certificate
3. Junior / Intermediate / Group Certificate
4. Leaving Certificate Applied
5. Leaving Certificate
6. Post Leaving Certificate
7. Third-Level Qualification
8. Other _____

At what level on the National Qualifications Framework are the majority of your VTOS subjects?

1. Level 3
2. Level 4
3. Level 5
4. I dont know
5. Other _____

Which of the following best describes your VTOS centre?

1. Adult education classes only
2. Part of a Secondary (post Primary) school campus
3. Part of a Post Leaving Certificate campus
4. Other _____

How did you first find out about the VTOS course you are doing?

1. FÁS / Local Employment Scheme
2. Social Welfare Office
3. Poster
4. Newsletter / Flier
5. Newspaper / Radio
6. Friend / Neighbour
7. Guidance Service
8. Other _____

Before starting your course, did you consider joining any other courses?

1. Yes
2. No

If you answered Yes to the previous question, what other course options did you consider?

How many educational / training courses have you participated in (other than your current course) in the last 5 years?

1. None
2. 1 - 3
3. 4 or more

What do you think of a two year timeframe for VTOS?

1. Too long
2. Just right
3. Too short

Do you feel you are likely to successfully finish your current course?

- 1. Yes definitely
- 2. Probably
- 3. I am not sure
- 4. No I don't think so

If you were to successfully complete your VTOS course, do you think you would do further studies?

- 1. Yes
- 2. No

Do you know others who might have joined you at your VTOS centre but in the end did not?

- 1. Yes
- 2. No

If you answered Yes to the previous question, what do you think was the main reason that they did not start the course?

Which of the following would best describe your initial school experience?

- 1. Very Bad
- 2. Bad
- 3. Good
- 4. Very Good

Please indicate how important EACH of these reasons were in your decision NOT to join VTOS before now?

	Not important	Important	Don't Know
I did not know what was available	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I did not have the time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I was not eligible for financial support	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I did not think I was able to do a course	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The courses were not relevant	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My friends and family were not supportive	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Health issues	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
I like studying the course content.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I enjoy learning with others.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Adult education is an important way to help people cope with life changes.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Money spent on adult education is money well spent.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Adult education makes me feel better about myself.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am above average as a learner compared to my friends outside the course.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am above average as a learner compared to the other students on my course.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I think my class work is very good.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I think my contribution in class is very good.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My attitude to learning has changed for the better since starting this course.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

In relation to financial supports, please give your opinions on the following;

	Yes	No	Not Applicable
Do you think the training bonus of €31.80 per week is sufficient?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you think the meal allowance of €4.00 per week is sufficient?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you think the mileage allowance is sufficient?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you think the childcare allowance of €63.49 per week is sufficient?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you think the class materials provided to you (free of charge) are sufficient?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

How does returning to adult education leave you financially?

1. Better off
2. Worse off
3. The same

How important a motivating factor was Each of the following reasons in your decision to join VTOS?

	Not a Motivating Factor	Low Motivating Factor	Medium Motivating Factor	High Motivating Factor	Highest Motivating Factor
To avail of additional monies.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To avoid having to take a job with poor conditions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To boost self-confidence / self-esteem.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Encouraged by an organisation or professional.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Encouraged by family member or friend.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To improve overall level of education.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To occupy free time.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To meet new people.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To achieve a personal ambition.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To assist children or grandchildren with school work.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To get a qualification leading to further studies.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To get a qualification leading to a job.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please rate Each of the following reasons on a sliding scale, in terms of making it difficult for you to join VTOS.

	Not a Difficulty	Low Level Difficulty	Medium Level Difficulty	High Level Difficulty	Very Difficult
Family commitments.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fear of failure.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Feeling too old.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Guilt / feeling selfish.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lack of information.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Loss of income (Unavailable for work).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Low self-confidence / self-esteem.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Low literacy level.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Negative experience of initial schooling.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Peer pressure.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pressure on personal finances.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Physical disability.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Transport.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

How would you rate Each of the following?



	Most unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Satisfactory	Very satisfactory
Location of your centre	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Appearance of your centre	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The centre atmosphere	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Range of courses	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Quality of courses	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Your timetable	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The length of each class	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The length of lunch / tea breaks	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The length of holidays	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Computer facilities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Classroom facilities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Qualifications offered	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Public perception of the centre	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Support for the learner	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Policies or rules of the centre	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Appendix Eight Student survey results

Note: The count reflects the number of valid responses to each question (without error or omission) thus the count total can differ slightly between questions. Small variations occur because whilst respondents had to complete each question, some questions were structured with sub questions and in these instances not all sub questions were completed. All percentages are based on the valid count as per the formulas of the statistical package utilised, namely www.questionpro.com. This method of recording and presenting the data is the widely accepted practice in the field of social science research. The Tables as presented are extracted directly from the software package.





Gender

Frequency Analysis

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	Male	151	29.15%					
2.	Female	367	70.85%					
	Total	518	100%					

Age

Frequency Analysis

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	21-30	158	30.50%					
2.	31-44	207	39.96%					
3.	45-55	115	22.20%					
4.	56+	38	7.34%					
	Total	518	100%					

Where were you born?

Frequency Analysis

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	Ireland	393	75.87%	<div></div>				
2.	Other EU Country	44	8.49%	<div></div>				
3.	Other	81	15.64%	<div></div>				
	Total	518	100%					







Marital Status

Frequency Analysis

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	Co-habiting	41	7.92%	<div></div>				
2.	Divorced/Separated	44	8.49%	<div></div>				
3.	Married	221	42.66%	<div></div>				
4.	Single	199	38.42%	<div></div>				
5.	Widowed	10	1.93%	<div></div>				
6.	Other	3	0.58%	<div></div>				
	Total	518	100%					




Which one of the following qualifying categories applies to you?

Frequency Analysis

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	Disability Allowance / Benefit	76	14.67%					
2.	One Parent Family Payment	84	16.22%					
3.	Unemployment Assistance / Benefit	281	54.25%					
4.	Dependent Spouse of an eligible person	11	2.12%					
5.	Signing for Credits	23	4.44%					
6.	Other	43	8.30%					
	Total	518	100%					



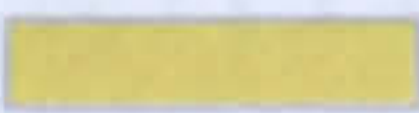
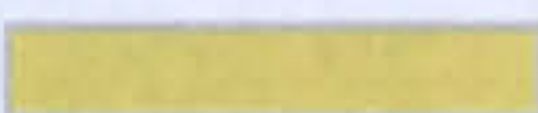
Which year of your VTOS course are you in now?

Frequency Analysis

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	1st Year	285	55.02%					
2.	2nd Year	203	39.19%					
3.	3rd Year	30	5.79%					
	Total	518	100%					






How far do you travel to attend your VTOS course (one way)?

Frequency Analysis

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	Less than 1 Mile	133	25.68%					
2.	1 - 3 Miles	141	27.22%					
3.	4 - 8 Miles	108	20.85%					
4.	9 Miles (or more)	136	26.25%					
	Total	518	100%					

How do you usually travel to and from your VTOS course?

Frequency Analysis

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	Drive	302	58.30%					
2.	Get a lift	51	9.85%					
3.	Public Transport	42	8.11%					
4.	Walk / Bicycle	117	22.59%					
5.	Other	6	1.16%					
	Total	518	100%					

Which of the following best describes the area where you now live?

Frequency Analysis

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	City	109	21.04%	<div></div>				
2.	Large Town (>30,000)	71	13.71%	<div></div>				
3.	Town (<30,000)	144	27.80%	<div></div>				
4.	Village / Countryside	194	37.45%	<div></div>				
	Total	518	100%					

Please choose your highest educational qualification prior to joining VTOS. (Choose only one). *If your qualifications are from outside Ireland, please pick the option which is closest to the level of your own educational qualifications or you can enter your particular qualification in the 'Other' option.*

Frequency Analysis

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	None	34	6.56%	<div></div>				
2.	Primary Certificate	59	11.39%	<div></div>				
3.	Junior / Intermediate / Group Certificate	160	30.89%	<div></div>				
4.	Leaving Certificate Applied	15	2.90%	<div></div>				
5.	Leaving Certificate	145	27.99%	<div></div>				
6.	Post Leaving Certificate	36	6.95%	<div></div>				
7.	Third-Level Qualification	31	5.98%	<div></div>				
8.	Other	38	7.34%	<div></div>				
	Total	518	100%					

At what level on the National Qualifications Framework are the majority of your VTOS subjects?

Frequency Analysis

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	Level 3	49	9.46%	<div></div>				
2.	Level 4	72	13.90%	<div></div>				
3.	Level 5	346	66.80%	<div></div>				
4.	I don't know	31	5.98%	<div></div>				
5.	Other	20	3.86%	<div></div>				
	Total	518	100%					









Which of the following best describes your VTOS centre?

Frequency Analysis

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	Adult education classes only	424	81.85%	<div></div>				
2.	Part of a Secondary (post Primary) school campus	37	7.14%	<div></div>				
3.	Part of a Post Leaving Certificate campus	36	6.95%	<div></div>				
4.	Other	21	4.05%	<div></div>				
	Total	518	100%					



How did you first find out about the VTOS course you are doing?

Frequency Analysis

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	FÁS / Local Employment Scheme	61	11.78%					
2.	Social Welfare Office	45	8.69%					
3.	Poster	13	2.51%					
4.	Newsletter / Flier	44	8.49%					
5.	Newspaper / Radio	69	13.32%					
6.	Friend / Neighbour	213	41.12%					
7.	Guidance Service	43	8.30%					
8.	Other	30	5.79%					
	Total	518	100%					

Before starting your course, did you consider joining any other courses?

Frequency Analysis

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	Yes	191	36.87%					
2.	No	327	63.13%					
	Total	518	100%					

How many educational / training courses have you participated in (other than your current course) in the last 5 years?

Frequency Analysis

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	None	263	50.77%	<div></div>				
2.	1 - 3	238	45.95%	<div></div>				
3.	4 or more	17	3.28%	<div></div>				
	Total	518	100%					

What do you think of a two year timeframe for VTOS?

Frequency Analysis

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	Too long	35	6.82%	<div></div>				
2.	Just right	337	65.69%	<div></div>				
3.	Too short	141	27.49%	<div></div>				
	Total	513	100%					

Do you feel you are likely to successfully finish your current course?

Frequency Analysis

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	Yes definitely	368	71.04%	<div></div>				
2.	Probably	117	22.59%	<div></div>				
3.	I am not sure	30	5.79%	<div></div>				
4.	No I don't think so	3	0.58%	<div></div>				
	Total	518	100%					

If you were to successfully complete your VTOS course, do you think you would do further studies?

Frequency Analysis

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	Yes	427	82.43%	<div></div>				
2.	No	91	17.57%	<div></div>				
	Total	518	100%					

Do you know others who might have joined you at your VTOS centre but in the end did not?

Frequency Analysis

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	Yes	149	28.76%	<div></div>				
2.	No	369	71.24%	<div></div>				
	Total	518	100%					

Which of the following would best describe your initial school experience?

Frequency Analysis

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	Very Bad	38	7.34%	<div></div>				
2.	Bad	110	21.24%	<div></div>				
3.	Good	280	54.05%	<div></div>				
4.	Very Good	90	17.37%	<div></div>				
	Total	518	100%					

Please indicate how important EACH of these reasons were in your decision NOT to join VTOS before now?

Summary Findings.

Overall Matrix Scorecard

Question	Count	Score	Not important / Important / Dont Know
1. I did not know what was available	482	1.971	<div></div>
2. I did not have the time	464	1.731	<div></div>
I was not eligible for financial support	458	1.814	<div></div>
3. I did not think I was able to do a course	465	1.712	<div></div>
5. The courses were not relevant	445	1.742	<div></div>
6. My friends and family were not supportive	447	1.519	<div></div>
7. Health issues	447	1.544	<div></div>
Average		>1.719	

Please indicate how important EACH of these reasons were in your decision NOT to join VTOS before now?




I did not know what was available

Frequency Analysis

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%40%60%80%100%
1.	Not important /	92	19.09%	<div></div>
2.	Important /	312	64.73%	<div></div>
3.	Don't Know	78	16.18%	<div></div>
	Total	482	100%	




I did not have the time

Frequency Analysis

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	Not important /	180	38.79%					
2.	Important /	229	49.35%					
3.	Don't Know	55	11.85%					
	Total	464	100%					




I was not eligible for financial support

Frequency Analysis

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	Not important /	176	38.43%					
2.	Important /	191	41.70%					
3.	Don't Know	91	19.87%					
	Total	458	100%					

I did not think I was able to do a course

Frequency Analysis

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	Not important /	202	43.44%					
2.	Important /	195	41.94%					
3.	Don't Know	68	14.62%					
	Total	465	100%					

The courses were not relevant

Frequency Analysis

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	Not important /	222	49.89%					
2.	Important /	116	26.07%					
3.	Don't Know	107	24.04%					
	Total	445	100%					

My friends and family were not supportive

Frequency Analysis

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	Not important /	281	62.86%					
2.	Important /	100	22.37%					
3.	Don't Know	66	14.77%					
	Total	447	100%					

Health issues

Frequency Analysis

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	Not important /	258	57.72%					
2.	Important /	135	30.20%					
3.	Don't Know	54	12.08%					
	Total	447	100%					

Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Summary Findings.

Overall Matrix Scorecard

Question	Count	Score	Agree	Disagree	Dont Know
1. I like studying the course content.	502	1.120	<div></div>		
2. I enjoy learning with others.	505	1.046	<div></div>		
Adult education is an important way to help people cope with life changes.	508	1.093	<div></div>		
3.					
4. Money spent on adult education is money well spent.	505	1.087	<div></div>		
5. Adult education makes me feel better about myself.	505	1.071	<div></div>		
6. I am above average as a learner compared to my friends outside the course.	498	1.829	<div></div>		
7. I am above average as a learner compared to the other students on my course.	490	2.014	<div></div>		
8. I think my classwork is very good.	500	1.434	<div></div>		
9. I think my contribution in class is very good.	498	1.470	<div></div>		
10. My attitude to learning has changed for the better since starting this course.	502	1.135	<div></div>		
Average >1.330					

I like studying the course content.

Frequency Analysis

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	Agree /	465	92.63%	<div></div>				
2.	Disagree /	14	2.79%	<div></div>				
3.	Dont Know	23	4.58%	<div></div>				
	Total	502	100%					

I enjoy learning with others.

Frequency Analysis

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	Agree /	491	97.23%	<div></div>				
2.	Disagree /	5	0.99%	<div></div>				
3.	Dont Know	9	1.78%	<div></div>				
	Total	505	100%					

Adult education is an important way to help people cope with life changes.

Frequency Analysis

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	Agree /	478	94.09%	<div></div>				
2.	Disagree /	13	2.56%	<div></div>				
3.	Dont Know	17	3.35%	<div></div>				
	Total	508	100%					

Money spent on adult education is money well spent.

Frequency Analysis

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	Agree /	479	94.85%	<div></div>				
2.	Disagree /	8	1.58%	<div></div>				
3.	Dont Know	18	3.56%	<div></div>				
	Total	505	100%					

Adult education makes me feel better about myself.

Frequency Analysis

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	Agree /	483	95.64%	<div></div>				
2.	Disagree /	8	1.58%	<div></div>				
3.	Dont Know	14	2.77%	<div></div>				
	Total	505	100%					

I am above average as a learner compared to my friends outside the course.

Frequency Analysis

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	Agree /	202	40.56%	<div></div>				
2.	Disagree /	179	35.94%	<div></div>				
3.	Dont Know	117	23.49%	<div></div>				
	Total	498	100%					

I am above average as a learner compared to the other students on my course.

Frequency Analysis

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	Agree /	126	25.71%	<div></div>				
2.	Disagree /	231	47.14%	<div></div>				
3.	Dont Know	133	27.14%	<div></div>				
	Total	490	100%					

I think my classwork is very good.

Frequency Analysis

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	Agree /	375	75.00%	<div></div>				
2.	Disagree /	33	6.60%	<div></div>				
3.	Dont Know	92	18.40%	<div></div>				
	Total	500	100%					

I think my contribution in class is very good.

Frequency Analysis

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	Agree /	366	73.49%	<div></div>				
2.	Disagree /	30	6.02%	<div></div>				
3.	Dont Know	102	20.48%	<div></div>				
	Total	498	100%					

My attitude to learning has changed for the better since starting this course.

Frequency Analysis

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	Agree /	456	90.84%	<div></div>				
2.	Disagree /	24	4.78%	<div></div>				
3.	Dont Know	22	4.38%	<div></div>				
	Total	502	100%					

Do you think the training bonus of €31.80 per week is sufficient

Frequency Analysis

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	Yes	147	28.77%	<div></div>				
2.	No	274	53.62%	<div></div>				
3.	Not Applicable	90	17.61%	<div></div>				
	Total	511	100%					

Do you think the meal allowance of €4.00 per week is sufficient

Frequency Analysis

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	Yes	72	14.15%	<div></div>				
2.	No	399	78.39%	<div></div>				
3.	Not Applicable	38	7.47%	<div></div>				
	Total	509	100%					

Do you think the mileage allowance is sufficient

Frequency Analysis

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	Yes	86	17.03%	<div></div>				
2.	No	272	53.86%	<div></div>				
3.	Not Applicable	147	29.11%	<div></div>				
	Total	505	100%					

Do you think the childcare allowance of €63.49 per week is sufficient

Frequency Analysis

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	Yes	103	20.64%	<div></div>				
2.	No	168	33.67%	<div></div>				
3.	Not Applicable	228	45.69%	<div></div>				
	Total	499	100%					

Do you think the class materials provided to you (free of charge) are sufficient

Frequency Analysis

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	Yes	391	77.89%	<div></div>				
2.	No	96	19.12%	<div></div>				
3.	Not Applicable	15	2.99%	<div></div>				
	Total	502	100%					

How does returning to adult education leave you financially?

Frequency Analysis

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	Better off	131	25.29%	<div></div>				
2.	Worse off	151	29.15%	<div></div>				
3.	The same	236	45.56%	<div></div>				
	Total	518	100%					

How important a motivating factor was Each of the following reasons in your decision to join VTOS?

To avail of additional monies.

Frequency Analysis

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	Not a Motivating Factor	286	57.55%	<div></div>				
2.	Low Motivating Factor	65	13.08%	<div></div>				
3.	Medium Motivating Factor	81	16.30%	<div></div>				
4.	High Motivating Factor	45	9.05%	<div></div>				
5.	Highest Motivating Factor	20	4.02%	<div></div>				
	Total	497	100%					

To avoid having to take a job with poor conditions.

Frequency Analysis

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	Not a Motivating Factor	199	39.96%					
2.	Low Motivating Factor	41	8.23%					
3.	Medium Motivating Factor	70	14.06%					
4.	High Motivating Factor	102	20.48%					
5.	Highest Motivating Factor	86	17.27%					
	Total	498	100%					

To boost self-confidence / self-esteem.

Frequency Analysis

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	Not a Motivating Factor	43	8.58%					
2.	Low Motivating Factor	24	4.79%					
3.	Medium Motivating Factor	84	16.77%					
4.	High Motivating Factor	176	35.13%					
5.	Highest Motivating Factor	174	34.73%					
	Total	501	100%					

Encouraged by an organisation or professional.

Frequency Analysis

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	Not a Motivating Factor	218	43.95%					
2.	Low Motivating Factor	33	6.65%					
3.	Medium Motivating Factor	81	16.33%					
4.	High Motivating Factor	113	22.78%					
5.	Highest Motivating Factor	51	10.28%					
	Total	496	100%					

Encouraged by family member or friend.

Frequency Analysis

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	Not a Motivating Factor	130	26.16%					
2.	Low Motivating Factor	31	6.24%					
3.	Medium Motivating Factor	106	21.33%					
4.	High Motivating Factor	135	27.16%					
5.	Highest Motivating Factor	95	19.11%					
	Total	497	100%					

To improve overall level of education.

Frequency Analysis

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	Not a Motivating Factor	22	4.38%	<div></div>				
2.	Low Motivating Factor	10	1.99%	<div></div>				
3.	Medium Motivating Factor	42	8.37%	<div></div>				
4.	High Motivating Factor	156	31.08%	<div></div>				
5.	Highest Motivating Factor	272	54.18%	<div></div>				
	Total	502	100%					






To occupy free time.

Frequency Analysis

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	Not a Motivating Factor	196	39.44%	<div></div>				
2.	Low Motivating Factor	58	11.67%	<div></div>				
3.	Medium Motivating Factor	104	20.93%	<div></div>				
4.	High Motivating Factor	91	18.31%	<div></div>				
5.	Highest Motivating Factor	48	9.66%	<div></div>				
	Total	497	100%					






To meet new people.

Frequency Analysis

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	Not a Motivating Factor	82	16.40%					
2.	Low Motivating Factor	43	8.60%					
3.	Medium Motivating Factor	139	27.80 %					
4.	High Motivating Factor	127	25.40%					
5.	Highest Motivating Factor	109	21.80%					
	Total	500	100 %					

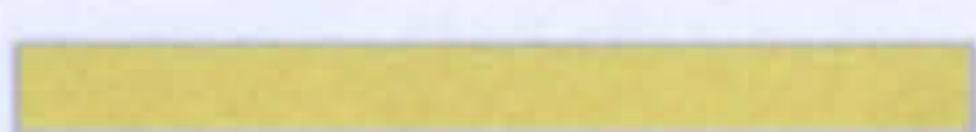




To achieve a personal ambition.

Frequency Analysis

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	Not a Motivating Factor	35	6.99%					
2.	Low Motivating Factor	16	3.19%					
3.	Medium Motivating Factor	52	10.38%					
4.	High Motivating Factor	156	31.14%					
5.	Highest Motivating Factor	242	48.30 %					
	Total	501	100 %					






To assist children or grandchildren with school work.

Frequency Analysis

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	Not a Motivating Factor	242	48.59%					
2.	Low Motivating Factor	33	6.63%					
3.	Medium Motivating Factor	76	15.26%					
4.	High Motivating Factor	71	14.26%					
5.	Highest Motivating Factor	76	15.26%					
	Total	498	100%					






To get a qualification leading to further studies.

Frequency Analysis

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	Not a Motivating Factor	61	12.20%					
2.	Low Motivating Factor	27	5.40%					
3.	Medium Motivating Factor	56	11.20%					
4.	High Motivating Factor	131	26.20%					
5.	Highest Motivating Factor	225	45.00%					
	Total	500	100%					

To get a qualification leading to a job.


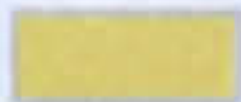


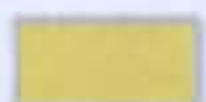
Frequency Analysis

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	Not a Motivating Factor	42	8.37%					
2.	Low Motivating Factor	18	3.59%					
3.	Medium Motivating Factor	48	9.56%					
4.	High Motivating Factor	109	21.71%					
5.	Highest Motivating Factor	285	56.77%					
	Total	502	100%					

Please rate Each of the following reasons on a sliding scale, in terms of making it difficult for you to join VTOS.


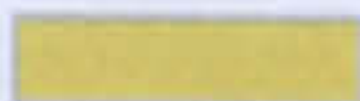
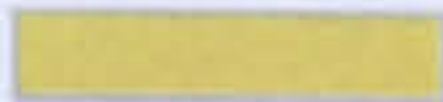

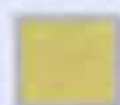
Family commitments.

Frequency Analysis

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	Not a Difficulty	239	47.33%					
2.	Low Level Difficulty	59	11.68%					
3.	Medium Level Difficulty	98	19.41%					
4.	High Level Difficulty	63	12.48%					
5.	Very Difficult	46	9.11%					
	Total	505	100%					






Fear of failure.

Frequency Analysis

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	Not a Difficulty	212	42.32%					
2.	Low Level Difficulty	88	17.56%					
3.	Medium Level Difficulty	108	21.56%					
4.	High Level Difficulty	64	12.77%					
5.	Very Difficult	29	5.79%					
	Total	501	100%					






Feeling too old.

Frequency Analysis

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	Not a Difficulty	304	60.92%					
2.	Low Level Difficulty	63	12.63%					
3.	Medium Level Difficulty	68	13.63%					
4.	High Level Difficulty	43	8.62%					
5.	Very Difficult	21	4.21%					
	Total	499	100%					

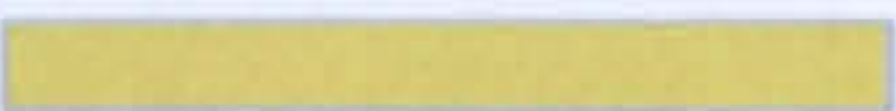
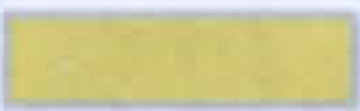
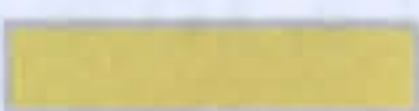


Guilt / feeling selfish.

Frequency Analysis

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	Not a Difficulty	340	68.55%					
2.	Low Level Difficulty	63	12.70%					
3.	Medium Level Difficulty	65	13.10%					
4.	High Level Difficulty	16	3.23%					
5.	Very Difficult	12	2.42%					
	Total	496	100%					

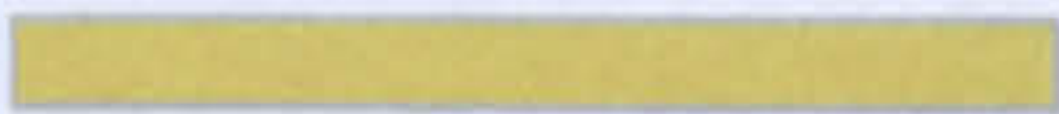



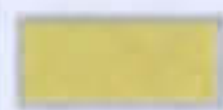
Lack of information.

Frequency Analysis

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	Not a Difficulty	214	43.58%					
2.	Low Level Difficulty	87	17.72%					
3.	Medium Level Difficulty	102	20.77%					
4.	High Level Difficulty	51	10.39%					
5.	Very Difficult	37	7.54%					
	Total	491	100%					






Loss of income (Unavailable for work).

Frequency Analysis

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	Not a Difficulty	249	51.02%					
2.	Low Level Difficulty	68	13.93%					
3.	Medium Level Difficulty	74	15.16%					
4.	High Level Difficulty	46	9.43%					
5.	Very Difficult	51	10.45%					
	Total	488	100%					






Low self-confidence / self-esteem.

Frequency Analysis

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	Not a Difficulty	213	43.12%					
2.	Low Level Difficulty	65	13.16%					
3.	Medium Level Difficulty	111	22.47%					
4.	High Level Difficulty	54	10.93%					
5.	Very Difficult	51	10.32%					
	Total	494	100%					






Low literacy level.

Frequency Analysis

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	Not a Difficulty	333	67.27%					
2.	Low Level Difficulty	53	10.71%					
3.	Medium Level Difficulty	59	11.92%					
4.	High Level Difficulty	23	4.65%					
5.	Very Difficult	27	5.45%					
	Total	495	100%					

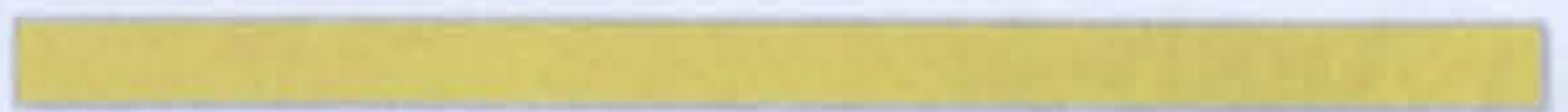




Negative experience of initial schooling.

Frequency Analysis

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	Not a Difficulty	245	49.49%					
2.	Low Level Difficulty	58	11.72%					
3.	Medium Level Difficulty	83	16.77%					
4.	High Level Difficulty	47	9.49%					
5.	Very Difficult	62	12.53%					
	Total	495	100%					






Peer pressure.

Frequency Analysis

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	Not a Difficulty	377	76.32%					
2.	Low Level Difficulty	51	10.32%					
3.	Medium Level Difficulty	34	6.88%					
4.	High Level Difficulty	22	4.45%					
5.	Very Difficult	10	2.02%					
	Total	494	100%					






Pressure on personal finances.

Frequency Analysis

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	Not a Difficulty	233	47.17%					
2.	Low Level Difficulty	58	11.74%					
3.	Medium Level Difficulty	85	17.21%					
4.	High Level Difficulty	68	13.77%					
5.	Very Difficult	50	10.12%					
	Total	494	100%					






Physical disability.

Frequency Analysis

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	Not a Difficulty	403	81.91%					
2.	Low Level Difficulty	30	6.10%					
3.	Medium Level Difficulty	26	5.28%					
4.	High Level Difficulty	16	3.25%					
5.	Very Difficult	17	3.46%					
	Total	492	100%					

Transport.
















Frequency Analysis

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	Not a Difficulty	361	72.64%					
2.	Low Level Difficulty	36	7.24%					
3.	Medium Level Difficulty	42	8.45%					
4.	High Level Difficulty	29	5.84%					
5.	Very Difficult	29	5.84%					
	Total	497	100%					

Summary Findings.

How would you rate Each of the following?

Overall Matrix Scorecard

Question	Count	Score	Most unsatisfactory /	Unsatisfactory /	Satisfactory /	Very satisfactory
1. Location of your centre	513	3.209				
2. Appearance of your centre	511	3.047				
3. The centre atmosphere	508	3.313				
4. Range of courses	510	3.096				
5. Quality of courses	505	3.352				
6. Your timetable	510	3.216				
7. The length of each class	505	3.194				
8. The length of lunch / tea breaks	511	3.094				
9. The length of holidays	510	3.363				
10. Computer facilities	507	3.260				
11. Classroom facilities	509	3.185				
12. Qualifications offered	504	3.319				
13. Public perception of the centre	505	3.071				
14. Support for the learner	507	3.339				
15. Policies or rules of the centre	503	3.284				
Average >3.223						

Appendix Nine Student survey gender analysis

A summary gender analysis of the VTOS students surveyed online (15% of national sample).

Personal profile					
2. Age	21-30	31-44	45-55	56+	
Male (%)	30.19	39.62	20.13	10.06	
Female (%)	29.46	40.82	23.26	6.46	
3. Birth place	Ireland	Other EU	Outside EU		
Male (%)	76.73	6.29	16.98		
Female (%)	75.19	9.56	15.25		
4. Marital status	Co-habiting	Divorce/Separated	Married	Single	Other
Male (%)	8.18	5.03	34.59	50.94	1.26
Female (%)	8.01	9.82	45.99	33.07	3.11
5. Welfare status	Disability	Lone Parent	Unemployed	Credits	Other
Male (%)	18.24	1.89	69.18	1.89	8.80
Female (%)	12.92	22.22	48.58	5.17	11.11
9. Student address	City	Large Town	Town	Country	
Male (%)	33.33	10.07	28.30	28.30	
Female (%)	17.57	15.50	27.39	39.54	
6. Year of study	First year	Second year	Third year		
Male (%)	63.52	32.71	3.77		
Female (%)	50.90	42.38	6.72		

10. Education level	>Leaving Certificate	Other	Leaving Certificate	Junior Certificate	Primary	None
Male (%)	8.80	11.32	32.07	24.53	13.85	9.43
Female (%)	14.21	6.72	29.72	33.33	10.08	5.94
11. Study level	Level 3		Level 4	Level 5	Unknown	Other
Male (%)	11.32		15.09	57.87	9.43	6.29
Female (%)	9.04		13.19	70.80	4.13	2.84

Description of the learning environment					
12. Type of centre	Adult Ed. Only		Part of a school	Part of a PLC	Other
Male (%)	76.73		9.43	11.32	2.52
Female (%)	84.75		5.68	5.18	4.39
7. Distance to centre	< 1 mile		1 – 3 miles	4 – 8 miles	9+ miles
Male (%)	32.70		26.42	16.98	23.90
Female (%)	23.26		28.42	22.74	25.58
8. Transport type	Drive	Walk/Bicycle	Get a Lift	Public	Other
Male (%)	37.11	35.85	11.95	13.84	1.25
Female (%)	65.12	17.83	9.56	6.46	1.03

Pre decision making process							
13. Awareness	FÁS	Poster Flier	Welfare	Friend	Paper Radio	Guidance	Other
Male (%)	13.84	12.58	13.21	33.96	10.69	9.43	6.29
Female (%)	10.34	10.60	6.98	44.44	14.47	7.49	5.68

14. Study options	Yes I considered	No I did not	
Male (%)	36.48	63.52	
Female (%)	37.21	62.79	
16. Previous study	None	1 - 3 courses	4+ courses
Male (%)	52.20	46.54	1.26
Female (%)	49.10	47.02	3.88

22. Initial school	Very Bad	Bad	Good	Very Good
Male (%)	12.58	23.27	53.46	10.69
Female (%)	5.43	19.63	55.04	19.90

Course length				
17. VTOS length	Too Long	Just Right	Too Short	
Male (%)	10.76	62.02	27.22	
Female (%)	4.96	68.15	26.89	
Looking to the future				
18. Completion	Yes definitely	Probably	Not Sure	No
Male (%)	59.12	32.08	8.18	0.62
Female (%)	74.94	19.90	4.65	0.51
19. Future study	Yes	No		
Male (%)	85.53	14.47		
Female (%)	81.40	18.60		

Attitudinal questions			
24. I Like studying the course content	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
Male (%)	88.89	3.92	7.19
Female (%)	94.13	2.40	3.47
24. I enjoy learning with others	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
Male (%)	93.55	1.94	4.51
Female (%)	98.67	0.80	0.53
24. Adult Education is a help with life changes	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
Male (%)	91.61	3.87	4.52
Female (%)	95.25	2.11	2.64
24. Money should be spent on adult education	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
Male (%)	92.90	1.29	5.81
Female (%)	95.74	1.60	2.66
24. Adult education makes me feel better	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
Male (%)	92.86	1.95	5.19
Female (%)	97.08	1.33	1.59
24. I am a better learner than friends outside	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
Male (%)	44.16	31.82	24.02
Female (%)	38.92	38.38	22.70
24. I am a better leaner than my fellow students	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
Male (%)	25.83	40.40	33.77
Female (%)	24.45	52.20	23.35
24. I think my class work is very good	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
Male (%)	65.79	9.87	24.34
Female (%)	79.41	5.08	15.51
24. I think my contribution in class is very good	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
Male (%)	66.01	6.54	27.45
Female (%)	76.01	6.20	17.79
24. My attitude to learning has improved	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
Male (%)	82.47	7.79	9.74
Female (%)	93.85	3.74	2.41

Financial issues			
25. Is the training bonus sufficient?	Yes	No	Not App.
Male (%)	30.77	58.97	10.26
Female (%)	27.68	52.48	19.84
25. Is the meal allowance sufficient?	Yes	No	Not App.
Male (%)	13.46	79.49	7.05
Female (%)	14.44	77.69	7.87
25. Is the mileage allowance sufficient?	Yes	No	Not App.
Male (%)	17.53	53.90	28.57
Female (%)	16.36	53.83	29.81
25. Is the childcare allowance sufficient?	Yes	No	Not App.
Male (%)	16.56	33.11	50.33
Female (%)	21.33	34.40	44.27
25. Are the provided class materials sufficient?	Yes	No	Not App.
Male (%)	71.90	26.14	1.96
Female (%)	80.64	15.92	3.44
26. How does returning to adult education leave you financially?	Better off	Worse off	The same
Male (%)	26.42	29.56	44.02
Female (%)	26.10	28.42	45.48

27. Motivation issues		Significance of motivating factor			
Additional monies	Not	Low	Medium	High	Highest
Male (%)	50.99	15.89	13.92	12.58	6.62
Female (%)	59.52	11.80	17.42	8.31	2.95
To avoid a job with poor conditions	Not	Low	Medium	High	Highest
Male (%)	41.45	9.21	14.47	17.11	17.76
Female (%)	39.14	8.85	13.41	21.98	16.62
To boost self-confidence / self-esteem	Not	Low	Medium	High	Highest
Male (%)	12.50	3.95	18.42	34.87	30.26
Female (%)	6.65	5.05	17.03	33.24	38.03
Encouraged by an organisation or professional	Not	Low	Medium	High	Highest
Male (%)	47.02	6.62	13.91	19.87	12.58
Female (%)	43.82	6.45	17.74	22.85	9.14
Encouraged by a family member or friend	Not	Low	Medium	High	Highest
Male (%)	30.72	4.58	22.87	22.88	18.95
Female (%)	24.53	6.74	20.48	28.84	19.41
To improve overall level of education	Not	Low	Medium	High	Highest
Male (%)	2.01	4.70	8.72	32.89	51.68
Female (%)	5.00	1.32	8.68	30.26	54.74
To occupy free time	Not	Low	Medium	High	Highest
Male (%)	35.33	12.00	22.67	19.33	10.67
Female (%)	40.21	12.06	20.65	18.23	8.85
To meet new people	Not	Low	Medium	High	Highest
Male (%)	22.22	10.46	26.80	18.30	22.22
Female (%)	13.90	7.75	28.61	27.81	21.93
To achieve a personal ambition	Not	Low	Medium	High	Highest
Male (%)	9.87	5.26	13.82	25.66	45.39
Female (%)	6.13	2.13	9.60	33.07	49.07
To assist children or grandchildren	Not	Low	Medium	High	Highest
Male (%)	56.00	8.00	12.67	11.33	12.00
Female (%)	46.13	5.60	16.27	15.47	16.53
Qualification leading to further studies	Not	Low	Medium	High	Highest
Male (%)	15.13	3.95	13.81	22.37	44.74
Female (%)	11.76	5.88	11.23	27.01	44.12
Qualification leading to a job	Not	Low	Medium	High	Highest
Male (%)	12.42	9.15	11.11	21.57	45.75
Female (%)	6.93	1.07	9.6	21.33	61.07

28. Barriers		Level of Barrier			
Family commitments	Not	Low	Medium	High	Highest
Male (%)	62.58	10.32	11.62	6.45	9.03
Female (%)	40.32	12.20	22.54	15.92	9.02
Fear of failure	Not	Low	Medium	High	Highest
Male (%)	53.29	14.47	14.48	14.47	3.29
Female (%)	38.30	18.35	23.93	12.77	6.65
Feeling too old	Not	Low	Medium	High	Highest
Male (%)	63.58	11.92	13.24	6.62	4.64
Female (%)	60.00	12.27	13.86	9.87	4.00
Guilt / Feeling selfish	Not	Low	Medium	High	Highest
Male (%)	70.67	12.67	10.66	3.33	2.67
Female (%)	67.56	13.40	13.68	2.95	2.41
Lack of information	Not	Low	Medium	High	Highest
Male (%)	47.02	15.89	17.22	11.26	8.61
Female (%)	42.78	19.35	21.25	9.54	7.08
Loss of income / Unavailable for work	Not	Low	Medium	High	Highest
Male (%)	50.34	11.41	10.06	12.08	16.11
Female (%)	51.23	15.62	16.98	7.95	8.22
Low self-confidence / Self-esteem	Not	Low	Medium	High	Highest
Male (%)	48.32	15.44	18.12	8.72	9.40
Female (%)	40.86	12.10	23.11	12.37	11.56
Low literacy level	Not	Low	Medium	High	Highest
Male (%)	65.33	8.67	12.67	7.33	6.00
Female (%)	67.74	11.56	11.29	4.03	5.38
Negative experience of initial schooling	Not	Low	Medium	High	Highest
Male (%)	43.62	12.75	20.81	10.74	12.08
Female (%)	51.61	11.56	14.79	8.87	13.17
Peer pressure	Not	Low	Medium	High	Highest
Male (%)	70.47	12.08	8.73	6.04	2.68
Female (%)	78.23	9.95	6.18	3.76	1.88
Pressure on personal finance	Not	Low	Medium	High	Highest
Male (%)	48.30	8.16	17.69	10.88	14.97
Female (%)	47.72	13.14	16.35	14.48	8.31
Physical disability	Not	Low	Medium	High	Highest
Male (%)	76.87	5.44	7.49	3.40	6.80
Female (%)	84.32	6.49	4.33	2.97	1.89
Transport	Not	Low	Medium	High	Highest
Male (%)	67.11	7.38	10.08	7.38	8.05
Female (%)	75.34	7.51	7.76	4.83	4.56

29. VTOS student satisfaction ratings				
Location of your centre	Most unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Satisfactory	Very satisfactory
Male (%)	5.13	8.97	42.31	43.59
Female (%)	6.24	6.49	47.79	39.48
Appearance of your centre				
Male (%)	7.79	9.74	57.15	25.32
Female (%)	5.71	9.35	56.37	28.57
Centre atmosphere				
Male (%)	3.25	3.90	48.04	44.81
Female (%)	5.24	3.93	44.76	46.07
Range of courses				
Male (%)	6.45	10.97	59.35	23.23
Female (%)	4.70	8.35	53.79	33.16
Quality of courses				
Male (%)	2.61	1.96	56.21	39.22
Female (%)	3.97	1.32	47.88	46.83
Your timetable				
Male (%)	5.10	4.45	58.60	31.85
Female (%)	4.20	4.46	54.07	37.27
The length of each class				
Male (%)	3.27	9.80	58.17	28.76
Female (%)	4.21	6.05	52.37	37.37
The length of lunch/tea break				
Male (%)	5.77	12.82	58.33	23.08
Female (%)	4.70	7.31	56.14	31.85
The length of holidays				
Male (%)	1.95	5.84	54.55	37.66
Female (%)	3.65	1.56	46.35	48.44
Computer facilities				
Male (%)	6.45	9.04	46.45	38.06
Female (%)	5.01	7.39	39.58	48.02
Classroom facilities				
Male (%)	3.25	12.33	50.65	33.77
Female (%)	3.93	8.11	51.57	36.39

Appendix B: VTOS Student Satisfaction Survey

29. VTOS student satisfaction ratings (cont.)				
Qualifications offered	Most unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Satisfactory	Very satisfactory
Male (%)	3.25	3.25	64.28	29.22
Female (%)	3.97	2.38	45.24	48.41
Public perception of centre				
Male (%)	4.52	12.26	58.70	24.52
Female (%)	3.97	9.52	58.20	28.31
Support for the learner				
Male (%)	3.92	6.54	45.10	44.44
Female (%)	3.66	3.93	45.03	47.38
Policies or rules of the centre				
Male (%)	4.58	1.96	58.17	35.29
Female (%)	4.50	1.85	51.85	41.80

Appendix Ten**Workshop invite to coordinators**

To: VTOS Coordinator
From: Laurenz Egan, VTOS Coordinator, Coláiste Éile, Thurles, Co. Tipperary.
Re: Invitation to VTOS Workshop on Tuesday the 13th of May 2008.
Date: 18th of April 2008.

Dear VTOS colleague,

I hope this letter finds you and your VTOS team well. I am contacting you about a planned one-day **VTOS workshop on Tuesday the 13th of May 2008 in the Anner Hotel, Thurles**, which I believe will interest you and I hope you can attend, as the event is subject to minimum numbers.

I fully appreciate the demands of your role and duties and in our work 'no time is a good time'. Yet, as evidenced once again at the AGM of VTOS Coordinators yesterday, attention needs to be given to a variety of matters with as wide a VTOS audience as possible. The majority of us work in isolation and we need to take the tough decision to come together when possible.

This planned workshop has received the support of many, including the following; David Leahy, CEO, Antoinette Coffey, AEO, North Tipperary VEC, Helen Keogh, National VTOS Coordinator, Anne O' Keeffe, CEO, (with an interest in VTOS on behalf of the IVEA), Mervyn Griffin (outgoing chair, NAVC), and Jim Mc Namara, Chair, NAVC.

This day promises to be a lively event and many interesting findings from recent VTOS student and coordinator studies will be tabled to further inform the debate.

Travel and other related expenses for the day should be claimed through your own VEC.

Agenda for the day

9.30 - 9.50	Coffee & registration
9.50 - 10.00	Welcome & Opening address
10.00 - 11.40	Workshop 1 - <i>Barriers experienced by students</i>
11.40 - 12.00	Scones - Coffee & Tea
12.00 - 1.30	Workshop 2 - <i>Factors which influence students to access VTOS</i>
1.30 - 2.30	Lunch
2.30 - 3.30	Workshop 3 - <i>Looking to the future in light of discussions</i>
3.30 - 3.45	Closing address

Please let me know as soon as possible but no later than this coming Friday the 25th of April if you are able to attend. I will then be in contact with coordinators intending to participate.

Please e-mail legan@colaisteeile.ie or fax 0504 21166 or phone 0504 24585 to indicate if you are able to attend.

Thanking you all for your ongoing support which has been tremendous. Is mise le meas,

Laurenz Egan

Appendix Eleven Coordinator workshop findings

Note: Each sub-group consisted of four coordinators and coordinators involved in sub-groups were changed for each of the three sessions to facilitate a greater networking of thoughts and ideas. Findings are presented as recorded on Venn Diagram sheets.

Prompting questions for the obstacles (or barriers) session.

- What do you see as the dominant (embedded) barriers to local adults accessing your VTOS programme?
- What if any, have been the emergent barriers over the past 4 years?
- What barriers are likely to emerge now or in the near future?
- *Can the above barrier categories be associated with particular groupings in our society?*
- *Can you offer any further small, large or potential barriers?*

Barriers Workshop: Sub-group 1 - Individual responses.

- Lack of preparation for the programme - no pre-VTOS.
- Lack of additional supports - literacy, ICT, language (ESOL).
- Transport - geographical spread.
- Lack of childcare availability close by.
- Poor grasp of English.
- Fear of joining.
- Fear of being compared to others.
- Fear of not being able.
- Fear of being too old.
- Health issues and crises issues in personal life.
- The location of the centre (outskirts of a town), difficult to access.

- Inadequate grant allowances.
- Attractive grant options to join other training options - which may not be appropriate to their stage/age.
- The work boom prevents some accessing education.
- Lack of financial support.
- Women working in the home are excluded.
- Previous negative experience.
- Low self-confidence.
- Lack of awareness.
- Lack of information.
- Lack of national profile.
- Competing courses with better financial incentives.
- Pressure from social welfare to take seasonal work - effects qualifying period.
- Can't afford to leave certain jobs to retrain because of waiting periods.

Shared thoughts of Sub-group 1.

- Eligibility - seasonal work, low paid jobs, unsocial jobs.
- Childcare.
- Feminisation of VTOS - young men particularly feel they don't fit in.
- Lack of information.
- Lack of confidence.
- Health issues.
- Surviving on social welfare rates for the two years.
- The need for appropriately trained tutors in adult education methodologies.
- Lack of sufficient resources for programme delivery - particularly breadth.
- Age barrier - many people feel they are too old.

Barriers Workshop: Sub-group 2 - Individual responses.

- Tutor teaching to the test.
- Transport - rural areas - no bus service.
- Lack of resources for psychological assessment & resource teachers.
- Lack of information - most come to V.T.O.S. via word-of-mouth.
- B.T.E.I. available part-time - competition for V.T.O.S.
- Cost of childcare e.g. a mother with two pre-schoolers cannot afford childcare even with VTOS / V.E.C. support.
- Negative experience at school leading to fear of failure.
- Lack of resources at V.T.O.S. - students want to be busy & engaged, not left to private study half of the time.
- Disability - centre not wheelchair accessible.
- Lack of money - learners expecting to be paid a training allowance in addition to lone parent etc.
- Lack of physical structure and space (connected garage).
- Lack of information regarding full-time courses for adults and supports available.
- No adult guidance.
- Depression (diagnosed or otherwise) especially amongst lone mothers.
- 6 month eligibility criteria - they can start FÁS immediately.
- Cap on numbers - could fill more places.
- Lack of guidance.
- Lack of outreach.
- Negative previous educational experience.
- Lack of information - appropriate forms.
- Poor self-image.
- Fear of failure, of meeting new people, and of new challenges.
- Inability to learn, even how to behave.
- Immediacy, delayed perspective, lack of role models and limiting expectations.

Shared thoughts of Sub-group 2.

- Profile of V.T.O.S.
- Lack of information.
- Age.
- Disability.
- Depression.
- Emotional & psychological support.
- Part-time B.T.E.I.
- Childcare.
- Financial Allowance.
- Competent teachers with an adult education approach.
- Feminisation of V.T.O.S.
- How to deal with aggressive males.
- Lack of resources - physical structures, finance and teacher allocation.
- Narrow educational experience.
- Large size of groups.
- Negative previous experience.
- Fear of failure.
- Barriers to eligibility - 6 months on benefit.
- Elder care - no allowance for caring for elderly relations.
- Language - ESOL should be integrated.
- Length of year (43 weeks), compounds childcare problems.
- Size of groups.

Barriers Workshop: Sub-group 3 - Individual responses.

- Childcare for older school going children.
- Seasonal employment prevents students in summer.
- Full-time too long for some, part-time option might be a runner.
- Institutes of technology offering F.E.T.A.C. foundation courses.
- Mixed ability hard to accommodate especially with foreign students.
- Physical disability, limited resources to support.
- Lack of language support.
- Profile of V.T.O.S., both local and national.
- Financial incentives for students - travel, meal, training versus FÁS etc.
- Qualifying criteria e.g. 6 months unemployed.
- No access for women in the home.
- No access for recently unemployed.
- Age limits - 20 year olds, 66 year olds excluded.
- Elder care - childcare allowance provided but no elder care allowance.
- Language barrier - ESOL is not integrated into V.T.O.S.
- Literacy - same as above. Hours not available in teaching allocation (30 hours per 20 students) to allow much one-to-one as needed (embedded).
- Meal & travel allowance not adequate to cover costs of students especially those who have to travel from outlying rural areas (embedded).
- Structure of academic year - many participants manage to attend while children are at school but are not comfortable or are unable to meet financial circumstances involved in institutional childcare. If V.T.O.S. year is lengthened as recommended by auditor (VEC Support Service Unit) they will not attend over 43 week year.
- Groups of 20 are too big.
- VEC policies and supports - lack of inter-agency supports.
- Number of places, capacity.

- Premises (unsuitable).
 - Socio-economic factors - perceptions of education and learning.
 - Historical unemployment and disadvantage.
 - Lack of research.
 - Health (incl. mental health).
 - Resources - I.T. etc.
 - Agencies that perpetuate unemployment - need for radical thinking.
 - Lack of understanding of the nature of the V.T.O.S. programme by the DES.
 - Lack of awareness & understanding of the nature of learners in V.T.O.S. as a self-selecting group - disadvantage, unemployment, lack of education.
 - Lack of time & opportunity to develop a consensus based approach in the programme.
 - Uniform structures, readily identifiable - allowing for local factors and variations.
 - Financial supports, inadequate - meal & travel, training allowance for some.
 - Commitments as carers.
 - Geographical factors - access.
 - Children.
 - Eligibility; 6 months /Age 21 - 65.
 - Literacy / ESOL .
 - School year.
 - Groups of 20 - too large.
 - Not being on social welfare or disability for 6 months - applicants are not entitled to or do not have access to crèche facilities and therefore cannot attend courses.
 - Not enough V.T.O.S. places - some people more eligible than others - especially those who have less education and on live register for longer. Bias against those who are recently redundant and more educated even though they are eligible.
 - Some students not able for workload and full-time commitment.
-

- Lack of information.
- Insufficient crèche places.
- Length of day.
- Lack of childcare for all FETAC students prevents many from the lifelong learning process.
- There is no strategy for first time visitors e.g. queries are mostly answered by telephone.

Shared thoughts of Sub-group 3.

- Financial disadvantage versus FÁS & other agencies, meal and travel allowance, training payments.
- Qualifying criteria; 6 months unemployed, 21 - 65 only.
- Length of academic year - 43 weeks.
- Geography; transport and accessibility.
- Lack of inter-agency cooperation.
- Lack of profile of VTOS.
- Limited number of places.
- Language - integrate ESOL with V.T.O.S.
- Lack of progress as a result of years of lobbying, making case to VECs and Department of Education & Science and other agencies - no-one listening!
- Length of day 9-4, 30 hour contact per week - too long.

Barriers Workshop: Sub-group 4 - Individual responses.

- Transport.
- Financial inequalities - PLC grant - not PLC level competition.
- Literacy.
- Duration of the day.
- Family commitments.
- Resources - funding for additional services / access to additional services e.g. counselling.
- Increased access to 'basic' Third-level programmes.
- Childcare funding (lack of).
- Irish PLC maintenance grant.
- Perception of college as foreign college.
- Increased job availability.
- Competition from other schemes which may provide better funding & be more attractive to student e.g. FÁS training allowance, and B.T.E.I. part-time.
- Eligibility criteria - especially for non-nationals.
- No movement from BTEA to VTOS.
- Cost of childcare - only contribution paid by VEC. City childcare very expensive.
- Increased employment opportunities in the city - potential students choose work over further study.
- Increase in the cost of living means that the basic V.T.O.S. payment is not adequate to run a household.
- Easier access to 3rd level for people means they choose a university degree over a lower qualification, where ability levels may not match.
- Existing students sometimes feel the pressure of exams a barrier to them competing - the "bit of paper" takes over from the learning and the fear of failure becomes an issue especially if they've tried before and failed.
- V.T.O.S. centre running art course & 10 miles down the road 3 various art courses run PLC & they are able to access grants.

- No financial incentive unlike FÁS training etc.
- Age & confidence “I’m too old to learn something new”.
- V.T.O.S. down the line when it comes to promotion by FÁS, back to work, C.E. schemes.
- Transport.
- Length of school day.
- Funding may not be an issue to those on the course, but those to whom it may be have already left or never started because of the issue.

Shared thoughts of Sub-group 4.

- Other funded schemes - PLC grants, FÁS etc.
- Transport - transport costs / Inadequate funding for childcare.
- Essential services unavailable i.e. counselling - not funded.
- Easier access to 2nd level / Duration of day 9am - 4pm.
- Health & crisis, children’s health etc.
- Eligibility - seasonal work, 6 months.
- Low paying jobs but can’t afford to leave due to return.
- Social welfare office - discussions at local level / or VEC.

The second workshop explored motivational issues.

- Prompting questions for the motivation session.
- What do you do locally to raise awareness of VTOS?
 - Is VTOS about getting a job or improving onto further studies?
 - What is your local strategy for first time visitors to your centre?
 - *For VTOS in the future what measures could be put in place to further motivate adults to access VTOS?*

Motivation Workshop: Sub-group 1 - Individual responses.

- Focus; something to do all day.
- Those from job seekers are threatened that they will be knocked off register if they don't do some course.
- Love of subjects; art not art therapy.
- Better off financially - med card etc., compared to low paid job.
- Referral from tutors.
- Raise awareness; open days in the centre, visits to social welfare, local radio, articles in local papers and exhibitions of students work.
- Learning in an adult environment, friendly atmosphere.
- Past experiences with adult education tutors.
- Free to learn at student's own pace.
- Family circumstances etc. taken into consideration.
- Younger students; useful to get to 3rd level.
- Older students; useful to get a job.
- First time visitors; give leaflet and arrange for them to come back, if unsure refer to guidance counsellor.
- Re engagement in education after many years.
- Employment prospects.

- Young cohort; single parents, group success & achievement keeps them going.
- Do see progression - 2 year course, request for 3rd year is available.
- Physical adult learning environment.
- Awareness and publicity.
- ALO/AEGI/VTOS supports.
- Flexibility; learn at own speed.
- Personal development; prove to themselves that they can achieve.
- Get qualifications to go onto job.
- Study skills to prepare for 3rd level.
- Ease back into “outside world” if unemployed for a long time.
- Career guidance - different option routes given to them.
- Help with literacy.
- Word of mouth and advertising.
- ECDL remains popular.

Shared thoughts of Sub-group 1.

- Learning in an adult environment.
- Experienced tutors.
- FETAC / ECDL - can succeed in these - builds confidence.
- Freedom to learn at own pace.
- Stigma attached to social welfare - students like new status of being a “student”.
- Motivation of “threat” of no social welfare if they don’t apply for a course.

Motivation Workshop: Sub-group 2 - Individual responses.

- Peer example; former students as ambassadors.
- Social welfare pressure.
- Will to learn new skills towards employment.
- Teachers give them motivation; the will to go on trust.
- Families, partners and children as motivators.
- Previous satisfaction at passing exams.
- Open approach to registration; walk around centre, meet other students & staff.
- Keep in touch with correspondence and invites.
- Peer support in class PAL's - People who Activate Learning.
- Advertising.
- Promoting the national framework of qualifications.
- FETAC national advertising campaign great but where is wheelchair access?
- To get a qualification. To do the Leaving Certificate.
- To be able to progress onto a FÁS apprenticeship course i.e. get junior Cert.
- To go to college, 3rd level.
- To get a better job.
- To achieve a personal ambition, e.g. to have Leaving Cert. maths.
- Students stay on programme because they have established social network.
- They feel they are making progress.
- They are challenged by studies.
- They are in contact with career guidance.
- They enjoy the VTOS experience.
- They want to achieve success, to complete the course or programme.
- Raising awareness through distributing leaflets.
- First time visitors are accepted on "waiting list" and will be contacted later.

- Students are motivated by the chance to take up learning opportunities that weren't previously available to them for various reasons i.e. had to leave education to work, or what they wanted to study was not available to them.
- Most VTOS candidates are attending courses in order to further their studies in the hope of up-skilling for employment, going to college or generally broadening their knowledge in a given area.

Shared thoughts of Sub-group 2.

- Peer example and word of mouth.
- The prospect of new skills, a job or better qualifications.
- Leading to employment.
- Past tutor support.
- Family support.
- Nothing succeeds like "success" - exams!
- Crèche on premises.
- Personal ambition - "I have always wanted a second chance education".
- Previous satisfaction & enjoyment in learning, peer supports.
- Age and stage appropriate; children at school or left home.
- Awareness.
- Pressure from FÁS or social welfare.
- Adult environment supporting personal development.

Motivation Workshop: Sub-group 3 - Individual responses.

- Succeeding for the first time in a lot of cases.
- Use past and present students during open days or information mornings.
- Contact with progression agencies - see where they are going.
- Full-time guidance service.
- Peers.
- Progression from literacy or learning network supports.
- Raise the profile of VTOS for future.
- Appropriate options and staff.
- Adult ethos.
- Shared sense of enjoyment & achievement.
- Work in close liaison with other adult services e.g. obair or drug help centres.
- Work and further education are not mutually exclusive.
- Quality of staff.
- Vision of what they will be doing during the course and after the course.
- Tour of the centre & gardens.
- Find their own story & culture, mindful of their experiences & demands.
- A flexible set of options 1 year, 2 year & supports.
- Establish a deal or contract with the student.
- Word of mouth - encouraged by friends, neighbours, relations who have previously done a VTOS programme.
- Unemployed and disillusioned by previous employment.
- Want to get something better.
- Regretted leaving education system too early, want to try again.
- Children reared or at school, empty nest syndrome, want to turn attention to themselves.

- Want to further social welfare payments, benefits due to expire and means test would exclude allowance payment, further study maintains payments.
- Not ready for full employment but want to use time to up-skill and be better qualified when time comes when it suits to return to work.
- Make a new start, following marriage breakdown, depression, unemployment or move to new area.
- Feel inadequate when own children reach educational level higher than that of parent. Want to find more common grounds with growing children.
- Additional payment of €31.80 & childcare can make a difference when on a very low income.
- Company, social interaction.

Shared thoughts of Sub-group 3.

- Student participation in open days.
- Adult ethos.
- Extra funding would assist.
- Involvement with other agencies.
- Peers, social interaction, company.
- Shared sense of enjoyment, achievement and success.
- Crèche on site.
- Parking provided.
- Guidance service.
- Prospect of further education and employment.
- Constant student support.
- Increasing places would greatly reduce barriers.

Motivation Workshop: Sub-group 4 - Individual responses.

- Support they receive “minded like babies” for first three months.
- Location of course.
- Constant contact at student inquiry stage.
- Literacy support provided in the centre.
- The programme or courses on offer.
- Those who join are not as motivated by money as those who join PLC’s. (or are unaware of what they could be getting by going to a PLC).
- People (women) like to do the course while their children are young and they do not want to go into full-time job.
- Some people want to get off the live register and not have social welfare pushing them into jobs they do not want to do.
- Lack of job opportunities keep people on programme.
- To retrain, up-skill, and gain computer skills is a motivation.
- People who have experience of factory work want skills to allow them to do other jobs.
- Some who join will have partners of reasonable financial means and would not be eligible for a PLC grant due to household income. Some have PLC done already yet may not have successfully completed it.
- If they begin to feel comfortable and are treated with respect, they find that they are learning or able to learn.
- If learners become interested in the programme, it boosts self-confidence.
- Belonging as part of a group.
- Different status, no longer unemployed.
- Prospect of gaining a qualification.
- Improved status which may lead to a job.
- Gain English language qualification.
- Gain industry recognised certification in a specific skill area.
- Move away from the doldrums of signing on.

- A route to access 3rd level colleges or institutes of technology.
- Social contact.
- Improve their education levels.
- The help & support they receive while on a previous course.
- Be able to access education and funding & have ability to do part-time work, thus increasing income.
- Marking time until can work.

Shared thoughts of Sub-group 4.

- Help & support offered by VTOS.
- Adult learning atmosphere.
- Improve education levels.
- Prefer being a student rather than on live register - different status.
- Feel education is more important than certain jobs.
- Past & present students host information to increase access.
- Increase awareness of VTOS out among agencies.
- Funding not as relevant to those on course - those to whom it was relevant either did not start on the course or left the course.
- Clear financial distinction between VTOS training allowances & PLC grant.

Note: The third afternoon session looked at actions arising out of the mornings two sessions and the findings of that session are not recorded here as they are not specific to this research inquiry. Many of the suggestions made during the plenary sessions are echoed in the findings of this thesis.

Appendix Twelve Focus group student invitation

To: VTOS student.
From: Laurenz Egan, Open University Student & VTOS Coordinator,
Coláiste Éile, Thurles, Co. Tipperary
Re: Invitation to participate in Focus Group session specific to VTOS.
Date: May 2008.

Dear VTOS student,

Having recently completed a national online survey with the support of my fellow coordinators and more importantly with the support of hundreds of VTOS students, I now hope to meet with groups of VTOS students to explore particular VTOS issues.

The overall aim of this research is to uncover learners' motivations to return (or not to return) to VTOS and to better understand the obstacles encountered by such adults. It is hoped that the findings of this research would further improve the VTOS scheme nationally.

The group session would last for one hour and it is intended to have between 8 and 10 students and myself, the session would be audio recorded. Any information that you give during this research will be treated as confidential and any recorded data will be anonymised.

Please note that this researcher cannot ensure that comments made within the focus group session will not be repeated outside the group by other VTOS participants involved. It will however be stressed that persons should respect the comments of their fellow students.

The session in summary is about what brought you to VTOS, what made you sign up for your VTOS programme, and what led to your decision to start the course. It is also about what difficulties you may have faced in signing up for your VTOS programme, what made it hard for you to start your course, and what challenges did you have to overcome. The session is about your time up to starting your course and is not about your course from the time you started it. In other words, the session is a 'pre-VTOS' session.

If you would be willing to make yourself available to participate in such a focus group session please complete the Consent Form which is available from your coordinator. Please note you may withdraw from this process at any time should you wish to. If you need further detail on this research activity you can contact your VTOS coordinator, or myself legan@colaisteeile.ie or my research supervisor marie.morrissey@nuigalway.ie

Thank you for giving this letter your consideration and please note that even by consenting to participate, it may not be possible to include you in the session itself.

The session would take place at the end of May or early June and would not interfere with FETAC examinations. Wishing you every success in your studies.

Best wishes from a fellow learner,
Laurenz Egan

Appendix Thirteen Focus group consent form**VTOS Student Focus Group Consent Form – May/June 2008.**

I, _____ (VTOS participant's name), understand that I am being asked to participate in a focus group to explore VTOS issues relevant to accessing a VTOS programme. **Please tick each box below to indicate your consent to participate.**

I have received a copy of and read the letter of invitation to participate in a VTOS Focus group and am happy to participate in this session which is due to last approximately one hour. I understand that I am not receiving any payment or other reward for participating in this activity. ☐

I understand that the focus group will be conducted at a place and time that is convenient to me, and that it will involve group discussion with my fellow VTOS students. I accept that the focus group will be recorded using audio equipment. No participant will be identified with any findings which may be published and all comments will be treated in the strictest confidence. ☐

I understand that my participation in this project is completely voluntary and that I am free to decline to participate, without consequence, at any time prior to or at any point during the activity. I understand that any information I provide will be kept confidential, used only for the purposes of completing this research project, and will not be used in any way that can identify me. All responses, notes, and records will be kept in a secured environment and all raw data such as electronic tapes, or notes will be destroyed within three months of the completion of the research project. ☐

I understand that the results of this activity will be used exclusively by Laurenz Egan, student of the Open University and I also understand that there are no risks involved in participating in this activity, beyond those risks experienced in everyday life. ☐

I have read the information above. By ticking the boxes above and signing below and returning this form, I am consenting to participate in this VTOS Focus Group activity.

Participant name (please print): _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Please keep a copy of this consent form for your records. If you have other questions concerning your participation in this project, please contact me at: legan@colaisteeile.ie

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this project.

Appendix Fourteen***Focus group schedule*****Focus Group VTOS student Schedule****Part 1.**

When and where did you first hear about VTOS?

When and where did you hear about the course you chose to do?

When and where did you hear about your VTOS centre?

Was VTOS a return to education for you or a continuation in adult education?

What were you doing immediately prior to starting your VTOS programme?

Part 2.

What interested you in the idea of your VTOS course?

What encouragement (if any) did you receive when you were making the decision to return to education?

What were the main reasons for your decision to do the VTOS course?

Were there any other reasons which motivated you to do your VTOS course?

Part 3.

Were there things that made your decision to start the course more difficult?

Did you previously consider doing a similar type of course but did not do the course, if so what stopped you from doing that course then?

Do you know others who considered doing a similar or the same course but in the end did not, if so what do you think stopped them from taking the course?

In your opinion, what would make it easier for people to start a VTOS course?

Appendix Fifteen Venn Diagram group-work approach

- Group-work approach
 - We should have four people in each sub group.
 - Ensure a mix of experiences.
 - Be clear about the objective of the group discussion.
- Be clear about the process i.e. Divide the poster sheet as follows;
 - Each participant puts their ideas on an allocated section of the poster sheet.
 - Use the centre of the intersecting Venn Diagram to accumulate shared or similar ideas.
 - Then one participant goes to another group to explain what they have found.
 - That participant returns to their group and adds new information (if any).
 - One member of each group will then explain what the group has come up with.

